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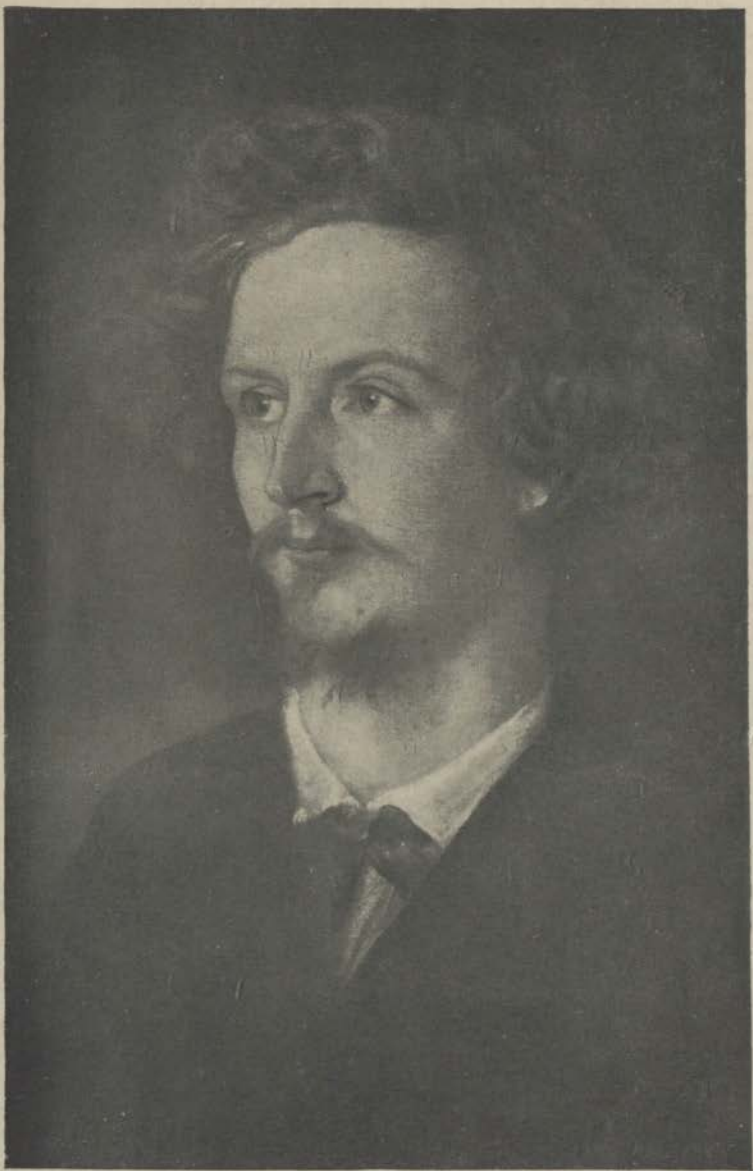
THE LETTERS OF
ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE



ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE.

After the portrait by Watts, in the National Portrait Gallery.

Frontispiece.

THE LETTERS OF ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

WITH SOME PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

BY THOMAS HAKE AND
ARTHUR COMPTON-RICKETT

99157

WITH PORTRAITS

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W. 1
1918

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TO

COULSON KERNAHAN,

THE FRIEND OF SWINBURNE,

WHOSE VITAL AND SENSITIVE PORTRAIT HAS DONE SO MUCH TO ENHANCE THE POET'S REPUTATION AS A GREAT AND LOVABLE PERSONALITY,

THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED

PREFATORY NOTE

OUR best thanks are due to Miss Teresa Watts for her permission to make use of the Swinburne correspondence; to Lady Henniker Heaton and to Sir John Henniker Heaton, Bart., for their great kindness in placing the beautiful Swinburne miniatures at our disposal; to Messrs. Heinemann for allowing us to quote from Swinburne's poetical writings; to the executors respectively of Victor Hugo and of Edwin Harrison for permitting the publication of certain letters; and to Mr. Thomas Hardy and Mrs. Coulson Kernahan for according us permission to quote from Swinburne letters in their possession.

We wish to express our gratitude, also, to Mr. Coulson Kernahan for counsel generously given, and to Sir John Henniker Heaton for several helpful suggestions.

Finally, to Mrs. John Lawrence Lambe, who translated the Hugo letters; to Mr. John Lawrence Lambe for his scholarly assistance in reading the

proofs; to Mr. John Murray for his unfailing kindness and courtesy; and to Miss Elizabeth Lee for her valuable clerical help throughout the preparation of this volume for the press, we acknowledge gratefully and cordially our indebtedness.

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INTRODUCTION

In the following pages an attempt is made, by means of a selection from a mass of Swinburne correspondence, to picture some of Swinburne's interests, tastes, and idiosyncrasies, from 1869 to about ten years before his death. The writers also have tried in a slight personal sketch at the close of the book to give some idea of Swinburne's life at The Pines down to the time of his last illness.

Mr. Edmund Gosse, in his recent *Life of Swinburne*, has shown his usual consummate cunning as a portrait-painter, but he has expended that cunning almost entirely upon the earlier and bohemian Swinburne. So whilst it is doubtful whether any other living writer could have given us so brilliant a study of this earlier Swinburne, Mr. Gosse's attitude towards the later Swinburne is not so satisfactory. And upon this point a word or so may be said here.

Mr. Gosse apparently takes the view that the Swinburne who lived at The Pines, and whom he saw rarely during the last quarter of a century of his life, was little more than a faded edition of the "orange-crested and tropical bird" that lives in his memory. Obviously, of course, the earlier Swinburne—the Swinburne, that is to say, of the pre-Putney period—is a Swinburne that appeals more definitely to the imagination. By comparison, the

drabber-coloured and more chastened figure that flitted in and out of The Pines for a quarter of a century seems a much tamer and less interesting Swinburne than the wayward, flamboyant personality that flashes its way through the greater part of Mr. Gosse's book. And Mr. Gosse, consequently, as Mr. Coulson Kernahan says in a fine critical article contributed to the *London Quarterly*,[1] is "a trifle bored about the Swinburne who elected to live with Watts-Dunton."

Is this boredom justified?

The Swinburne who went to stay with Watts-Dunton was a physical wreck, of whose life his doctor had despaired. He could not walk without the supporting arm of a friend, he could not even sit without his body being stricken with painful nervous convulsions, and he had lost the power to take solid food. A week or so at the Werter Road, under Watts-Dunton's wise care, worked an apparent miracle.

Yet, without in any way minimizing the therapeutic agencies for which his friend was primarily responsible, it is clear, from the rapidity of his recovery, that there were vast resources of nervous vitality, and that his natural hardiness of constitution had been underrated by his physician.

In an amazingly short time he was able to take lengthy walks, and it was soon apparent to all who saw him that he was in sounder health than ever he had been before. With the robuster nerve-tone certain qualities came to the fore, hitherto unsuspected, or blurred by the excessive sensibility that marked the bohemian Swinburne.

[1] 1917.

One of the qualities that soon showed itself in the Swinburne of The Pines was "a singular lovableness," as Mr. Coulson Kernahan was quick to perceive and define. But it was not the lovableness of the gentle and somewhat nerveless and weak-willed creature that some have imagined him to be; it was the lovableness of a clear-brained and essentially sweet-natured man.

True, he could "roar you as gentle as any sucking dove" where the ladies of the house and children were concerned, and to them he was ever a courteous and considerate friend. But he was capable also of still playing the Ercles Vein on occasion, and he could take the "lion's part," too, as many an indiscreet journalist found out to his cost.

Moreover, he hated dullness. His life went on smoothly with an external precision, but that is not the same as saying it was monotonous and tame. He loved plenty of life and fun, and managed to get it, too.

The Swinburne of The Pines was not a spent force in any sense of the word. His health, much affected at the time when he came to live with his friend, soon revived, and his remarkable vitality remained unimpaired until within a short time of his death. But he recognized his own weaknesses as he had never done before, and cheerfully concurred in a quiet and sequestered life as one likely to serve his best interests. Yet his life, though quiet and sheltered, was anything but stagnant; and Sir William Robertson Nicoll, who knew him during the later years, has well and rightly testified to the fact that he was "full to the

last of intellectual activity."[1] He saw many old friends, such as Professor Nichol and the Burtons, and made many new ones. Moreover, he was (and here he was aided by Watts-Dunton's alert and eager preoccupation with contemporary life and letters) keenly interested in the latest literary and journalistic developments.

Mr. Gosse pictures him as a "gentle, punctilious old gentleman, . . . very far indeed from being the brilliant being . . . the scarlet and azure macaw . . . who had been the wonder, the delight, and sometimes the terror of our earlier generation."

Some of his visitors, perhaps, saw in him merely a "gentle, punctilious old gentleman," but the impression was only a superficial one, for in the presence of congenial friends the old fiery enthusiasm and the old vivacity would flame out; and there was still quite sufficient waywardness to give the spice of the unexpected to the poet's moods.

But Mr. Gosse must allow the mark of time and advancing years upon his "scarlet and azure macaw." Even macaws grow old, and lose some of their brilliant lustre. And yet the astonishing thing about Swinburne is not that he should show some of the signs of advancing age, but that so much youthful ebullience should remain to the last.

It has been suggested that Swinburne was in all ways influenced by Watts-Dunton—that the influence was in the nature of a "tyranny." That he respected and valued Watts-Dunton's opinions is obvious enough; and that in the ordinary affairs of life he relied on his judgment is comprehensible

[1] *British Weekly*, April 12, 1917.

enough, considering that Watts-Dunton had wrought his moral and physical salvation. But the picture of the "friend of friends" as a kind of amiable Svengali is not convincing.

"In many literary matters Swinburne and I agree to differ," Watts-Dunton has often said. And it is true. They differed in their estimate of Victor Hugo's genius. "You will not be hurt or surprised to hear that I certainly do not think your notice of my great Master's great work adequate or just, for, if I said I did, I could not, and should not, expect you or anyone to believe me. I find, as usual, in your critical writing much general truth admirably expressed, with the particular application or exemplification of which I differ almost as cordially and almost as often as I agree with the main definition and enunciation of it. . . ."[1] Although this was written before the period of The Pines, there was never any alteration of his opinion here.

They differed about Keats and Shelley—Swinburne vastly preferred Shelley; they differed about William Morris, whose poetry Watts-Dunton rated more highly. And differences might be noted even in trifling matters, where both happened to admire a writer—such as Wilkie Collins. We recall a discussion over dinner, where Swinburne, in his most eloquently dogmatic mood, differed from his friend as to the comparative merits of *The Moonstone* and *The Woman in White*.[2]

That they were at one about many literary topics is quite true—about the Elizabethans and

[1] March 24, 1877.

[2] See post, "Swinburne at The Pines," Chapter VII.

the great Victorian novelists, for instance; but this was through an affinity of taste that had made itself evident in their first meeting. And even here there were numerous instances of differences in particular judgments. To Swinburne, *Othello* was Shakespeare's masterpiece; to Watts-Dunton, *Macbeth*.

We do not know what evidence Mr. Gosse has for declaring that Swinburne's change in his attitude towards Walt Whitman is an example of the slow tyranny exercised on Swinburne's judgment by his friend. But we do know that Watts-Dunton attributed this veering round to a pathological study published on Whitman the man, which both he and Swinburne read.

Assuming that Watts-Dunton's unfavourable view of Whitman did something to modify Swinburne's views, many cases could be quoted where Watts-Dunton's strong predilections had no effect whatever upon Swinburne. For instance, in criticizing (September, 1892) a sonnet of Watts-Dunton's, he objected to the term "love-*deeps*"—"a vile German compound for which I can only account by your admiration and apery of Carlyle as a *stylist*—to speak for once like the late lamented Czar in good American." And as in literature, so in life. Watts-Dunton vainly attempted to interest Swinburne in some personalities of the day to whom he was attached. "I'll meet them at lunch," said Swinburne; "but I won't have anything more to do with them." Occasionally he refused to meet them even at lunch. Watts-Dunton used to say that he always knew whether Swinburne approved of his friends or shared his interest in

them, by his attitude after lunch. If his verdict were favourable, he would ask up the friend into his own sanctum for a short while and show him his books; if unfavourable, he would shake hands stiffly, and march off without a word to his own quarters.

On the personal side, Watts-Dunton influenced Swinburne in preserving a sounder equipoise and in leading a healthier life. He discouraged the *morbidezza* note in Swinburne's muse, the excessive tendency to rely upon purely literary inspiration for his work. He influenced Swinburne in fostering in him a more intimate love of Nature, and this influence is discernible both in the correspondence and poetry of Swinburne's later years. Watts-Dunton's influence upon Swinburne was in the main a refining and mellowing, but in no sense a tyrannous, one.

One has no wish to exaggerate the value of this influence. Watts-Dunton had his share of human weaknesses, and his shade cannot certainly be suffering from undue elation at any hesitation on the part of critics to comment about them, and in some cases, where these weaknesses coincided with Swinburne's, they intensified by reaction the poet's own shortcomings. But when all allowance was made for these, he was, as has been said, a mellowing influence. To wipe off nearly thirty years of Swinburne's life as practically negligible, to pooh-pooh anything and everything that Swinburne did after he entered The Pines, is not only to do an injustice to Watts-Dunton, but, what is more to the point here, to underrate Swinburne.

No one would contend that the later Swinburne

was *qua* poet equal to the earlier Swinburne. But Swinburne belonged to the ecstatic order of poets who delight best when young and ardent. The lyric cry is at its best in youth. The question is, Are we to throw the blame upon the Putney air and The Pines *ménage?* Would Swinburne have sung any more poignantly in his later years had he lived, say, with Mr. Gosse? And if his later work does not efface memories of *Poems and Ballads* and *Songs before Sunrise* it is not unworthy of it. It is hard to see how merit can be denied—and high merit, too—to many of the Nature poems of his later years.

And it should be remembered that whilst undoubtedly the earlier work of Swinburne has a freshness, a witchery, an exultant opulence, that is relatively lacking in the later poetry, yet even this may be unduly magnified by the fact that we had grown used to the melody of the singer.

From first to last there was one quality that persisted in Swinburne—a whimsical, high-spirited humour. Of all the pre-Raphaelite circle he was the most humorous. Much has been said about the humour of Rossetti and Morris. In Morris' case, surely, it was more a sense of fun than of humour, and just an expression of his exuberant vitality. And in Rossetti's case it was much the same, though he had a more catholic appreciation of humour than Morris, who disliked satire and irony. Swinburne, on the other hand, not only had as keen a sense of humour as Rossetti, but possessed a faculty for humorous expression—quite distinct from a sense of humour—which he displayed in conversation, correspondence, and fitfully

in such literary flashes as his well-known parodies. Swinburne's humour seems to have been at its best in conversation, next best in his correspondence, and third best in terms of literature. Clever as his parodies are, surely there is more dexterity than humour about them, and they stand on a distinctly lower plane from the best work of Calverley, J. K. Stephen, or Sir Owen Seaman.

But Swinburne's humorous faculty was of enormous value to him as a man. It kept him young at heart.

To sum up, the Swinburne of The Pines was, despite the *aura* of waywardness that still hovered about him, a gracious and fascinating figure; perhaps even the more lovable because the impish and wayward spirit had never wholly quitted him. That Watts-Dunton is beyond criticism in all the methods he took to shelter his friend from disturbing outside influences — or influences that Watts-Dunton imagined might prove disturbing — would not be maintained by any impartial observer. But of Watts-Dunton's genuine affection for Swinburne, and—speaking generally—of the tactful skill and unremitting patience he showed in dealing with him, there seems to us no doubt. Whatever their faults, both were men extremely tenacious in their affections. If Swinburne's debt to Watts-Dunton has in the past been sometimes overrated, it is well that we should not run to the opposite extreme (as seems likely to-day) of underrating it.

A word in conclusion about the correspondence, with which this volume is chiefly concerned. It covers a period of nearly thirty years, and, when taken in connection with the delightful letters to

his family published by his cousin, Mrs. Disney Leith, enables us to form a fairly clear idea of Swinburne as a personality, quite apart from the comments and stories of friends related either here or elsewhere. It shows his weaknesses no less than his merits—the redundancy, the prolixity, more marked, as is natural, in the later correspondence, the over-emphasis; but it shows also no appreciable diminution from first to last of intellectual force, independence of thought, capacity for noble enthusiasm. And amid all the tempestuous extravagance that sounds from time to time in his letters as well as in his verse one can detect the tenderness, the great capacity for affection, and the courtesy that underlay his excitability. One is apt to forget this last point in the distractions caused by the eccentric side of Swinburne's genius. So many legends have grown round Swinburne's career, inspired by his extravagance as a young man, that many at last have come to regard him as essentially a brilliant *rococo* personality. But he was more than this. Beneath all the extravagances and absurdities there was a primal greatness, and at bottom the fine breeding and distinction of a great gentleman.

PART I

THE LETTERS OF ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

EARLY DAYS

THE exact landmark of Algernon Charles Swinburne's birthplace has not been preserved. When the subject was mooted at the time of his decease, as to whether a memorial tablet should be placed upon the house in which he was born, an unexpected obstacle presented itself. In the announcement given in *The Times* of April 7, 1837—"On the 5th instant, in Chester Street, Grosvenor Place, the Lady Jane Swinburne of a son"—the number on the door of the residence had been overlooked, and although every endeavour was made to trace that street number, nothing ever came of it. On consulting the London Directory of 1837, it was found that the name "Swinburne" did not appear among the tenants of the houses in Chester Street. Even an inquiry at Somerset House led to no better result; for it appeared, on reference being made, that there were no births recorded in the Registrar's Office prior to July, 1837, the entries having commenced three months after Algernon Charles Swinburne was born.

As a matter of fact, at the moment of their son's birth, Admiral and Lady Jane Swinburne happened to be making a short stay in London as guests of

a relation living in Chester Street. It was purely owing to this chance visit to the metropolis that Swinburne, who was in no sense a "Londoner," did not see the light at East Dene in the Isle of Wight, or at the ancestral home of the Swinburne family in Northumberland. And yet, to have been born within the precincts of Belgravia was an event not entirely displeasing to a man of his aristocratic leanings. Had it been possible for him to have selected his birthplace, the embryo poet would no doubt have chosen the Isle of Wight, since East Dene, his father's home at the time, is within sound of the sea. Northumberland, however, would have been the most appropriate birthplace, for Swinburne was a Northumbrian to the marrow.

It was at his grandfather's seat, Capheaton Castle, that so many summer and autumn days were spent during his boyhood and early manhood. Here he could wander at will over the wide moorland solitudes, conscious that the sight and sound of the sea off the north-eastern shores were within easy reach whenever there was the need of further inspiration. There are few poems even among Swinburne's lyrics richer in Nature inspiration than his *Winter in Northumberland.* It was to him a pure delight to sing of those sea-beaten and wind-ridden heights, where

> "In fierce March weather
> White waves break tether,
> And whirled together
> At either hand,
> Like weeds uplifted
> The tree-trunks rifted
> In spars are drifted,
> Like foam or sand,

EMILIA ELIZABETH BENNET.
LADY SWINBURNE.

CHARLES HENRY.
ADMIRAL SWINBURNE.

ELIZABETH SWINBURNE.
MRS. BOWDEN.

LADY JANE HENRYETTA ASHBURNHAM.
AFTERWARDS WIFE OF ADMIRAL SWINBURNE.

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Past swamp and sallow,
And reed-beds callow,
Through pool and shallow,
To wind and lea,
Till, no more tongue-tied,
Full flood and young tide
Roar down the rapids and storm the sea.

* * * * *

"O strong sea-sailor,
Whose cheek turns paler
For wind or hail or
For fear of thee?
O far sea-farer,
O thunder-bearer,
Thy songs are rarer
Than soft songs be.
O fleet-foot stranger,
O north-sea ranger,
Through days of danger
And ways of fear,
Blow thy horn here for us,
Blow the sky clear for us,
Send us the song of the sea to hear.

"Roll the strong stream of it
Up, till the scream of it
Wake from the dream of it
Children that sleep.
Seamen that fare for them
Forth, with a prayer for them;
Shall not God care for them,
Angels not keep?
Spare not the surges
Thy stormy scourges;
Spare us the dirges
Of wives that weep.
Turn back the waves for us;
Dig no fresh graves for us,
Wind, in the manifold gulfs of the deep."

* * * * *

He revelled in shaping these Border ballads, and delighted in reading aloud the pathetic poem of *The Tyneside Widow.*

"There's mony a man loves land and life
Love's life and land and fee;
And mony a man loves fair women,
But never a man loves me, my love,
But never a man loves me.

* * * * *

"I had his kiss upon my mouth,
His bairn upon my knee;
I would my soul and body were twain,
And the bairn and the kiss wi' me, my love,
And the bairn and the kiss wi' me.

* * * * *

"The father under the faem, my dear,
O sound and sound sleeps he;
I would the faem were ower my face,
And the father lay by me, my love,
And the father lay by me.

* * * * *

"My life is sealed with a seal of love,
And locked with love for a key;
And I lie wrang and I wake lang,
But ye tak' nae thought for me, my love,
But ye tak' nae thought for me.

"We were weel fain of love, my dear,
O fain and fain were we;
It was weel with a' the weary world,
But O, sae weel wi' me, my love,
But O, sae weel wi' me."

* * * * *

From another and more dramatic point of view *The Jacobite's Exile* is no less interesting, for it shows how thoroughly Swinburne's nostalgic instinct was awakened.

The conception of this ballad fired his dramatic imagination, and he entered into the situation as thoroughly as he would have done had he himself been banished from Northumberland, his beloved Borderland.

"The weary day rins down and dies,
The weary night wears through:
And never an hour is fair wi' flower,
And never a flower wi' dew.

"I would the day were night for me,
I would the night were day:
For then would I stand in my ain fair land,
As now in dreams I may.

"O lordly flow the Loire and Seine,
And loud the dark Durance:
But bonnier shine the braes of Tyne
Than a' the fields of France;
And the waves of Till that speak sae still
Gleam goodlier where they glance.

* * * * *

"But O gin I were there again,
Afar ayont the faem,
Cauld and dead in the sweet saft bed
That haps my sires at hame!

"We'll see nae mair the sea-banks fair,
And the sweet grey gleaming sky,
And the lordly strand of Northumberland,
And the goodly towers thereby:
And none shall know but the winds that blow
The graves wherein we lie."

But if it was Swinburne's proud boast that he could lay claim to being a "Borderer," there was one circumstance of which he was still prouder: his first *experience* in life had resembled in every detail Victor Hugo's first *experience*. At birth he was all but dead, certainly not expected to live an hour.

"The salt must have been in my blood before I was born," he would often say. And we can picture him in fancy being taken over the Bonchurch Down, as a little lad, where he could listen to the waves breaking on the shore below the Land-

slip, and drinking in the music that was so long to be familiar to him:

"Yours was I born, and ye,
The sea-wind and the sea,
Made all my soul in me
A song for ever,
A harp to string and smite
For love's sake of the bright
Wind and the sea's delight,
To fail them never:

"Not while on this side death
I hear what either saith
And drink of either's breath
With heart's thanksgiving,
That in my veins like wine
Some sharp salt blood of thine,
Some springtide pulse of brine,
Yet leaps up living.

* * * * *

"Peace with all graves on earth
For death or sleep or birth
Be alway, one in worth
One with another;
But when my time shall be,
O mother, O my sea,
Alive or dead, take me,
Me too, my mother."

Ex Voto.

Although Swinburne was never a poet of Nature in the sense that Wordsworth or Shelley were poets of Nature—for there were only certain moods of the earth that thoroughly gripped his imagination—yet from first to last the sea had always held for him a peculiar magic: from earliest childhood when shot head foremost out of his father's arms with a cry of ecstasy to meet an advancing wave, until the last sight and the last swim in the sea at Cromer when sixty-eight years of age. And the plastic days of boyhood on the English coast made

ELIZABETH EMILA BURRELL.
MRS. BENNET.

ISSABELLA BURRELL.
COUNTESS OF BEVERLEY.

PETER BURRELL.
1ST LORD GWYDYR.

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DUCHESS OF NORTHUMBERLAND.

ELIZABETH BURRELL.
DUCHESS OF HAMILTON AND
MARCHIONESS OF EXETER.

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upon him deep and permanent impressions. No change of colour, light or shade, no change of scent or sound, ever escaped him, whether it were at dawn, at noon, or at night.

When all these facts are taken into consideration no one will be surprised when told that Swinburne, in one of his more romantic moods in early manhood, was greatly enamoured of a smuggler's life. And like the gentleman in Gilbert's libretto, he would no doubt have felt gratified in being able to "live and die a Pirate King!"

"The life of a smuggler!" he exclaimed one moonlight night while standing on the shore at Bonchurch, with a fixed gaze to seaward. "That would be an ideal life indeed!" He had all the spirit of the old Elizabethan buccaneers, without, alas! their physique.

No man ever flamed up more responsively to a deed of daring in fiction or in real life than Swinburne. Often would he laud with characteristic hyperbole the Mariner Gilliatt in Victor Hugo's story, *The Toilers of the Sea*, as a hero who appealed to him with peculiar force.

In his *Study of Victor Hugo*, when referring to his master's five romances, "I may perhaps be permitted to say without fear of deserved rebuke," he declared, "that none is to me personally a treasure of greater price than *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*. The splendid energy of the book makes the superhuman energy of the hero seem not only possible but natural, and his triumph over all physical impossibilities not only natural but inevitable."

Swinburne's courage was extraordinary. At Eton it was regarded as a kind of invisible sword;

for mere physical strength does not always count as the best weapon in the battle of life. By means of some subtle force in his personality, though never put to the test in a pugilistic encounter, his pluck was never questioned by his Eton schoolfellows. It seemed to have been understood among them that bullying in his case was tacitly interdicted.

And this may possibly account for the fact that his school days at Eton were not so devoid of happiness as hinted at in some quarters. None the less, Eton was never a very congenial topic of conversation in after years.

Being "let alone," he soon showed himself to be one of the most omnivorous bookworms Eton had ever seen. All this outside reading, however, came into serious conflict with the curriculum. For it was at Eton that he began in real earnest to read Shakespeare and the old dramatists, and, in short, anything readable that he could lay his hands upon. It was here that Dickens, whose *Bleak House* was at the moment appearing in the once familiar monthly numbers, first came under Swinburne's notice.

In after years, most of the famous authors whose works absorbed Swinburne's attention at school, continued to exercise their powers of fascination over him. To the very last days of his life he was still reading the old dramatists and his favourite novelist, Dickens, with the same whole-hearted zest which he had exhibited in youth, when seated with a weighty tome resting on his knees, beside an antique window in his college rooms.

The influences at work in Swinburne's home sur-

roundings had instilled into him the firm belief that he was destined for the Church. His mother had carefully supervised his theological studies before the Eton period, and when the school days came to an end he was better instructed than most boys of seventeen in Biblical history. But at this time a strong impulse to enter the army possessed him; nor would, as he hastened to acquaint his parents, anything less than a cavalry regiment satisfy his ambition. The spirit was willing indeed! Moreover, the vivid accounts of the Charge at Balaclava that he read in the newspapers had seized upon his imagination. But, as a matter of fact, Swinburne was some inches below the average height, slight in build, and, furthermore, being afflicted with St. Vitus' dance, would scarcely have shaped well as a cavalry officer. He had besides to combat the strong disapproval expressed by his father.

When at last the military project had been squashed, Swinburne in a fit of chagrin, as he has frequently related, climbed Culver Cliff in order to "test his courage," about which for the moment he apparently experienced some doubt. The incident has formed the central motive of his autobiographical poem *Thalassius*.

For his climb up the cliff Swinburne, of course, chose the highest point; but before making the ascent he took a dip in the sea, midwinter though it chanced to be, in order to stimulate his nerves. Then he set his teeth and went straight for the rock, and the cliff gave way under him.

At one moment during his climb he found himself swinging in the air by his hands from a ledge where there was barely room for his fingers, and he

was only saved from going headlong to certain death by flinging out his feet sideways towards a projecting ledge of rock, which he just managed to reach. Here he paused for an instant to take breath, and then crawled up the remaining wall of cliff. When he gained the top he had not strength enough left to move from the cliff's edge, but sank helpless on his side, with the thought that in his semi-conscious condition he might roll over the cliff's edge after all. On recovering his senses, however, he found himself on the same spot at the top of the cliff where he had dropped down. On glancing round him he was somewhat startled to see a sheep staring at him within an inch of his nose, and with a look in its eyes so pitiful and sympathetic that he was constrained to break into an hysterical laugh ; whereupon the sheep instantly turned tail and scampered out of sight. This touching incident, as Swinburne humorously expressed it, made him vow that he never would eat a mutton chop again.

Having once roused himself out of his dream of "forlorn hopes and cavalry charges," Swinburne began seriously to entertain the less exciting programme of studying theology under a tutor with a view to ultimately taking Holy Orders. He had been brought up from boyhood as a *quasi*-Catholic, and when he entered Balliol College, Oxford, his religious opinions were still thoroughly orthodox. But he fell soon under the influence of his college friend, John Nichol, who was a free-thinker of the more aggressive order. After leaving Oxford he was seldom known to enter a church, unless he chanced to be staying at Holmwood, when he bent

to the will of his mother from a sense of unbounded affection. In later days he invariably roamed about the fields of Henley-on-Thames, composing lyrical poems, while the ladies were at church.

And yet it may be said truly that, in the deepest sense of the word, the later Swinburne was far more sensitive to religious influences and far more spiritual in his attitude towards life than was the author of *Poems and Ballads.*

I

Poems (1870), Criticism of the work of D. G. R., Pater, William Morris, Tennyson, etc.

(1) SWINBURNE AND ROSSETTI

RECALLING to mind incidents in Swinburne's life, one realizes that he was "saved from his friends," at the crucial moment, on more than one occasion. By some fortunate meeting with a good genius, the evil genii lost their control over his destiny.

As early as the Oxford days there were agencies at work counterbalancing, though not entirely overpowering, the baneful influence of certain roystering spirits with whom he chanced to be associated.

One of the most salutary effects upon Swinburne's career at this time was his meeting with Dante Gabriel Rossetti. That meeting led to a close intimacy which, though only lasting about twelve years (1857-1870), was one of the most memorable of literary periods in both their lives. As a painter, no less than as a poet, Swinburne's admiration of Rossetti never lost in fervour, even in his later years, when, like Rossetti himself, he became more exclusive and self-absorbed.[1] "He

[1] During the last years of Rossetti's life (1871-1882) he and Swinburne seldom met.

strove and ever failed," to use Swinburne's oft-quoted words, "to express all the sweet and sudden passion of youth towards greatness in its elder." It was towards the close of 1857, while Rossetti was at work one day upon "Sir Lancelot before the Shrine of Sangraal," at the Union Society's Hall at Oxford, that Swinburne, an undergraduate, youthful and ebullient, entered the room and introduced himself *sans cérémonie*.

When Rossetti, soon after this meeting, returned to London, Swinburne became an almost daily visitor at the studio in Chatham Place, Blackfriars Bridge.

Rossetti now for the first time—it was in 1860—showed Swinburne the manuscript of his volume of translations, *The Early Italian Poets*, which he published a year later.

Self-reliant as he was from first to last, the poet-painter was always ready to discuss his own work with interested and qualified friends.

It was about a year after the publication of *The Early Italian Poets*, at a time when he was engaged upon a portrait of Swinburne, that the great tragedy occurred in Rossetti's life. On February 10, 1862, Swinburne, with Rossetti and his wife, had dined in the evening at the Sablonnière Hotel, in Leicester Square. The following morning, on reaching the rooms in Chatham Place, where he went by appointment to sit for his portrait, Swinburne heard how this beautiful and accomplished woman, whom Swinburne often spoke of as "one with marvellous charms of mind and person," had died from the effects of laudanum—the drug which she had been in the habit of taking to soothe

her nerves. The circumstance of her decease made Swinburne's appearance at the inquest imperative, when, as he has himself recorded, the jury returned a verdict of accidental death. On the day upon which she was buried, Rossetti placed in his wife's coffin the manuscript volume of his *Poems*, which he had been on the eve of publishing. When at last Rossetti had been persuaded to have the manuscript exhumed some eight years later, and published it, Swinburne took a deep interest in the revision of the proofs. His letters to Rossetti at this time (1869-70), touching upon the merit of the various poems, exhibit this interest in a striking manner, and no such keen interest in another man's work was ever before or afterwards expressed by Swinburne. In fact, Swinburne was singularly indifferent on the whole, and as regards the work of outsiders, to the work of many contemporaries.

There are, indeed, few instances on record in which Swinburne can be found to have shown more than lukewarm concern in the unpublished work of those literary aspirants whose appeals for a word of recognition never ceased to reach him as long as he lived. This fact in itself must of necessity give to these letters of Swinburne's to the poet-painter a special interest. Before introducing them, however, a word is needed in order that the reader may realize on what terms of exceptional intimacy Swinburne and Rossetti were at this period.

During Rossetti's brief married life, from May, 1860, to February, 1862, there had been no one, except his own relations, whom he saw more constantly than Swinburne. The first volume—the two poetic dramas, *The Queen Mother* and *Rosa-*

mund, published by Swinburne, 1861—was dedicated to Rossetti. And in the same year Rossetti also published his first volume, which has already been touched upon, *The Early Italian Poets*. The two friends were thoroughly *en rapport*. It was a period of abounding mental activity in both their lives. The years that followed upon the death of Mrs. Rossetti found them constantly together, for Swinburne had become Rossetti's housemate at 16, Cheyne Walk, on the day that Rossetti took up his abode at that famous "house of call" of the noted poets and painters of that mid-Victorian period.

To have Swinburne for a housemate after the loss of his wife was Rossetti's cherished desire. He needed some congenial spirit to interest and enliven his broken life. But to put it plainly, he found Swinburne more stimulating as a companion than Swinburne found him, and Swinburne did not care for the place. At Cheyne Walk, for a poet engaged in creating (as Swinburne then was) a masterpiece like *Atalanta*, the prospect of even so sympathetic a companion as Rossetti was not a very brilliant one. The house was gloomy, with the reputation of being haunted. Nor was the outlook from the window of the small front room set apart as a study for Swinburne by any means inspiring. It was a room on the left side of the entrance hall, an apartment given over, after Swinburne went away, to broken easels and such-like discarded artistic paraphernalia for the rest of Rossetti's life. From this window in those days there was no pleasant Thames Embankment, no visible sign of Battersea Park on the opposite

reach of the river. The scene that met Swinburne's eye when he chanced to look out of the window and across the roadway consisted of tumbledown dwellings with narrow spaces between, leading to the river-side where antiquated boats and barges were moored in muddy surroundings. At times the poet would turn his back upon this "Whistler picture" of the Thames, not to escape depression, for he seldom suffered from low spirits, but in order to seek diversion. Mounting the staircase leading to the brighter and more extensive drawing-room overhead, with its five windows giving their broader view of the same Thames-side, he would sometimes discover there George Meredith, who was at this period Rossetti's other gifted housemate. If Rossetti also chanced to be there, Meredith's mood was often combative, pacing to and fro in the spacious apartment in hot argument with the poet-painter, and giving utterance to his views in phraseology so Carlylesque that Swinburne would fume with rage from his seat in the window.

It was some time after Swinburne had ceased to reside at Cheyne Walk, and while staying at Holmwood, his father's place at Henley-on-Thames, that the circumstance of Rossetti's projected volume, *Poems*, led to the correspondence between the two literary friends. It was a moment of peculiar interest in their lives, for they were in the plenitude of their powers at this time. Rossetti was occupied in painting his great picture, "Dante's Dream," while Swinburne was completing *Songs before Sunrise*—a volume of verse that so sharply contrasted with the first series of *Poems and*

Ballads, the one hectic and troubled with erotic emotion, the other breathing the keen air of the mountain-side.

In the midst of this absorbing work, Swinburne began to correspond with his friend, showing from first to last a full yet always critical appreciation of Rossetti's poetic genius.

(2) SWINBURNE'S LETTERS TO ROSSETTI.

The earliest of Swinburne's letters is a brief acknowledgment of the proof-sheets of the forthcoming volume of verse, entitled *Poems*, that Rossetti had read to his young friend in manuscript at Chatham Place ten years before. Swinburne had now reached the mature age of thirty-two, and his critical faculty had had time to develop into fuller ripeness.

During five months, from the beginning of December, 1869, until he had completed his long *Fortnightly* critique on the volume of 1870—though engaged upon important work of his own—Swinburne gave his mind, if not all his time, to the reading of the proof-sheets.

"HOLMWOOD,
"HENLEY-ON-THAMES,
"*November* 28, 1869.

"MY DEAR GABRIEL,

"Many thanks for your poems which have just arrived. It is a delight to see them in print. I write before falling to upon them, as there is only an early post to-day. I am sure your alterations will prove to be for the best, even ultimately in my eyes. It is simply at first difficult to unfasten the old associations of a verse which has grown into

one's thoughts, as many of your verses have into mine. I see a most noble new last stanza to the *Dante*—which as well as *Jenny* looks shorter in print than I expected. Thanks, too, for the rough copy of *Lisa*. The poem will appear in the *Fortnightly* for February.

"Now I am going to ask a favour. Will you and William read the enclosed note from Ellis and let me have your opinion *thereanent?* And as I must have a friend to act with and for me in the matter, perhaps one of you would be good enough to take that trouble. William, who did once before look at my accounts with Hotten, would know where and how to have him. Evidently it must be done, as we are agreed—and as evidently it had better be done by a deputy than by me. I should be entangled in a net of words, proofs, appeals, and the devil knows what. I would write to William separately, but I want you *both* to see Ellis's note, and so write this to both of you at once. . . . I know you will forgive my troubling you both with my affairs, when a friend's help would be really of such use to them.

"I liked Pater's article on Leonardo very much. I confess I did fancy there was a little spice of my style, as you say, but much good stuff of his own, and much of interest.

"I am very glad you liked my sonnets on reading them. Morley (Thornton writes me word) 'takes not a little credit for moral courage in printing them,' saying, however, 'that it is well to let the world know the view taken of the man by certain minds.' He has had at least a dozen remonstrances on the matter since publication.

"I am curious to know what you think of Flaubert's new book. After a careful and thorough reading, I think it perhaps as admirable, if not so wonderful, as *Madame Bovary*. I have made an analysis of all the events and situations of Mary Stuart's life from Rizzio's murder to her flight into England, and am choked and stifled with the excessive wealth of splendid subjects and dramatic effects. But something I must carve or weave out of them.

"Ever yours affectionately,
"A. C. SWINBURNE.

"P.S.—Is it Ellis who prints and is to publish for you?

"P.P.S.—The *Rappel* has reprinted from the *Courier de l'Europe* an excellent version of my article on *L'Homme qui Rit*, omitting only such passages as are merely addressed to English ears, and describing the articles as '*dû à la plume du premier poète actuel de l'Angleterre.*' (*Pendez-vous, MM. Tennyson et Cie.*)"

Swinburne's "Hotten affair," to which he refers in the foregoing letter, caused him great trouble and annoyance for more than a year after he had broached the subject to Rossetti and his brother, and appealed to them for advice. The affair, however, was ultimately settled to Swinburne's complete satisfaction by Theodore Watts-Dunton in the early days of their friendship.[1]

In the letter that now follows, Swinburne at once

[1] Vide *Life and Letters of Theodore Watts-Dunton*, vol. i., chap. v. (T. C. and E. C. Jack, Ltd).

touches upon the agreeable task of reading with critical intent the proof-sheets of Rossetti's *Poems*.

'HOLMWOOD,
"*December* 10, 1869.

"MY DEAR GABRIEL,

"It is a most real pleasure and interest to me," he begins, "to watch the growth and help (if I can) in the arrangement of your poems to ever so small an extent by ever such petty suggestions of detail. And to show my sincerity I may tell you that on opening your letter I glanced first at the proof-sheets that fell out, and at once thought I should have to write in unwilling protest against one addition at least—about the first I ever did—whatever I may have thought of excisions. When I found the insertions were restorations of cancelled lines, I felt confirmed and relieved from the sense of presumption and doubt. I should unhesitatingly reject the five added lines on the Haymarket, though admirably well turned and ingenious; both because (as you say) they intercept the thought, and still more because they utterly deaden and erase the superb effect of the lines preceding, wound up by the last, and spoiling the most tremendous passage in the highest part of the poem. The simple, sudden sound of that last great line has in it a world of pity and terror (it strikes me in passing I should perhaps add to Mrs. Quickly's motto that of Othello, 'But yet the pity of it!' so expressing both sides of the sentiment of the poem); besides, the line sums once for all, with all due impression of the point, the realistic aspect and hearing of the whole. I think, too, I prefer the plain verse:

"'Along the ground thro' the blown grass,'

to the interpolated lines. The 'purfelled buds' I noticed before, and like—or do not dislike; I think the text good with them or without. The 'yesterday's rose' on the bosom is better than beautiful, being so lifelike, but I would condense if I could the thought into a couplet; it reads a little draggingly. I like the 'double-bedded' verse, and indeed think it absolutely wanted to point and enforce the preceding line—but is not the phrase inaccurate? Surely it can only mean that there were two beds, implying separate sleepers, which is chaste, but startling; as a suggestion—proper, but improbable. Also it sounds to me to have just a shade or breath of coarseness—escaped so exquisitely elsewhere in the most familiar parts of the poem; 'double-pillowed,' now, would evade this, and give better the idea of two heads waking together, as nobody can sleep on two pillows at once. But some such verse ought to stand—whatever else on the occasion may stand or not. An allusion to cockcrow would be neat and appropriate among the other phenomena of returning day.

"I should, if I were you, replace with alterations the lines long since cut out at the beginning after:

> "'. . . much daintier;'
>
> "'Whose eyes are like the skies; whose hair
> Holds the light globed like any shell;
> Fair flower, to fragrance reared so well
> Within love's sultriest hotbed. Nay,
> Poor flower, . . .' etc.

The break now comes too soon, and suddenly, and misses point by omission of the word 'flower' before; the eyes and hair are charming, and the next (third) line you might recast.

"The Dante as now completed I think greatly strengthened and beautified; but fine as the last stanza is in itself, I much prefer as the final word the verse:

"'Were steeper found than heaven or hell:'

as a more fit and impressive close to a poem on Dante in exile; appropriate to him alone, which the new stanza is not, and to my ear more solemn and memorable as a last note of music, including and concluding the whole scale of thought and sound. I think, too, the line 'among paths his feet knew well' more significant and apt by far than the new line.

"The title of your newly conceived poem is magnificent in promise; I hope you will be able to fall to on it. Let me know how you are, for it disturbs me to hear of you suffering in nerves or spirits.

"I should retain, but retouch, the four stanzas. I return, as you desire, in your own handwriting—retouch especially the third and fourth, which ought to be, and with little trouble will be, perfect in charm and distinctness. The two fancies of 'leaves thro' which a bird has flown,' and the 'blossom beating like a heart,' are as delicately beautiful as any in the poem.

"This is all I find to say now of the poems in question; of the sonnets gathered up together in the book, I can only say I am always in an equal admiration of wonder at their overrunning wealth of thought and phrase, clothed and set in such absolutely impeccable and inevitable perfection of expressive form.

"I have just received Topsy's book:[1] the Gudrun story is excellently told, I can see, and of keen interest; but I find generally no change in the *trailing* style of work. His Muse is like Homer's Trojan women; she drags her robes as she walks. I really think any Muse (when she is neither resting nor flying) ought to tighten her girdle, tuck up her skirts, and step out. It is better than Tennyson's short-winded and artificial concision—but there is such a thing as swift and spontaneous style. Top's is spontaneous and slow; and, especially, my ear hungers for more force and variety of sound in the verse. It looks as if he purposely avoided all strenuous emotion or strength of music in thought and word; and so, when set by other work as good, his work seems hardly done in thorough earnest. The verses of the months are exquisite—November, I think, especially.

"I presume the Hotten embroilment will clear up, more or less, and sooner or later; but the large sums he puts down as paid in the lump I certainly never received or cashed, though the small cheques are probably all right. I am shy of sending you a sonnet, as I might be of sending Shakespeare a play, or Shelley an ode; but I want to know if you think I have made the best of two lines you liked by making them the tail of a scorpion-sonnet.

"Tell me if it won't do. I trust you to say."

The following is the sonnet enclosed in Swinburne's letter to Rossetti, December 10, 1869:

[1] *The Earthly Paradise.* By William Morris (published 1868-1870).

A COUNSEL.

"O strong Republic of the nobler years,
Whose white feet shine beside Time's fairer flood,
That shall flow on the clearer for our blood
Now shed, and the less brackish for our tears;
When Time and Truth have put out hopes and fears
With certitude, and Love has burst the bud,
If these whose powers then down the wind shall scud [1]
Still live to feel thee blast their eyes and ears,
When thy foot's tread hath crushed their crowns and creeds,
Care thou not then to crush the beast that bleeds,
The snake, whose belly cleaveth to the sod,
Nor set thy foot on men as on their deeds;
But let the worm Napoleon crawl untrod,
Nor grant Mastai the gallows of his God."

In the first part of the above letter there are many points of interest to the student of poetry; for this letter shows how Swinburne's further suggestions were, in more than one instance, adopted by a poet singularly self-reliant on the whole as a poetic artist. The proposed restoration of lines in *Jenny* at once exhibit Swinburne in the light of a fastidious poetic critic. After the line in the poem quoted in Swinburne's letter,

"Could hardly make much daintier . . ."

the altered form in the proof,

"Whose eyes are like the skies; whose hair
Holds the light globed like any shell;
Fair flower, to fragrance reared so well
Within love's sultriest hot-bed—nay,
Poor flower . . ."

was abandoned, and the original words were restored in the published volume:

"Whose eyes are as blue skies, whose hair
Is countless gold incomparable.

---

[1] First written:

"If these who splashed thy skirts with blood and mud."

Fresh flower scarce touched with signs that tell
Of love's exuberant hot-bed :—nay,
Poor flower. . . ."

Again, the line

"Of many a double-bedded morn,"

the student will find, was changed, as Swinburne suggested, and now stands in Rossetti's published volume:

"Of many a double-pillowed morn."

Nor was the author of *Songs before Sunrise* slow to submit poems to Rossetti with a fervid hope that his own voice in lyric song, might

"Awake from her tomb
England, and France from her prison,
Sisters, a star by a star."

The manuscript of the poem, *A Counsel*, which Swinburne had enclosed in this letter to Rossetti (1869) was published six years later in *Songs of Two Nations* (1875), a volume in the nature of a supplement to the *Songs before Sunrise* (1871), for these two books are bound together in the second volume of the Collected Edition of Swinburne's poetical works. After submitting this sonnet, *A Counsel*, to Rossetti with such marked diffidence, one might naturally suppose that the poem was, at the time, in a crude condition; but on comparing this version of the poem with the version which subsequently appeared in *Songs of Two Nations*, it will be found that the only alterations that Swinburne made were, to substitute "smite" for "blast" on the eighth line, and "thine heel" for "thy foot" on the twelfth line.

Even in this one poem it is easy to discover the influence here at work upon Swinburne—as easy, indeed, as it was to discover the influence upon him

of the scenery, traditions, and legendary romance of Northumberland and the Borderland when composing his lyrics and ballads. His eloquent defence of Italy's cause, to be found in most of the poems in the volume in which *A Counsel* appears —the volume dedicated to Mazzini—was directly due to the influence of Swinburne's mother. This cultured woman had resided not only in Florence, but in other parts of Italy ; it was she who first awakened his love for Italy, and who taught her gifted son Italian years before his memorable visit to Walter Savage Landor at Fiesole in 1865, in that memorable year in which *Atalanta* was published.

In the passing reference Swinburne makes in this same letter to William Morris he shows less appreciation for the poetic genius of the author of *The Lovers of Gudrun*, as a whole, than was shown by most of his great contemporaries, despite his generous tribute to Morris' genius in his essay on *The Life and Death of Jason.* In that essay, some two years prior to this date, he had spoken of Morris as a " workman who has approved himself a master, acceptable into the guild of great poets on a footing of his own, to be shared and disputed by no other."

But in his reference to *The Lovers of Gudrun*, and subsequent references to Morris' poetry, the differences between the temperaments of the men disclose themselves.[1] In commenting on the slowness of Morris' work, and deprecating its trailing style, he clearly shows his imperfect sympathy with what really constitutes the peculiar beauty of that

[1] He had a warm appreciation of Morris' prose romances.

poet. The distinguishing quality of Morris' poetry lies in its atmospheric charm. It is simple, lucid, and straightforward, spontaneous always (save in some of the early verse), but with a singularly level excellence. When the poet ceases, we are reminded of the receding of the tide, not the drying up of a stream. Large effects, ample spaces of beauty, diffuseness rather than concentration, were what he aimed at. He strove to achieve excellence, not as Swinburne did, by marvellous juggling with words, by a glorious rush of sound; nor by creating beauty in some dazzling streaks of light, but by means of a diffusive, luminous atmosphere that should penetrate all portions of his work. He flies low purposely, designedly—this is what Swinburne called "trailing"—and while his verse undoubtedly lacks that thrill and exultation that we find in the supreme flights of his great contemporary, there is a clarity, an ease, a level excellence, to which Swinburne himself did not always attain.

After a passing word upon *The Holy Grail*, which had at that moment issued from the press, Swinburne in his next letter again takes up the proof-sheets of the poem *Jenny*, still exercising his mind.

The Holy Grail—whatever may have been Swinburne's unbiassed opinion of it at the time—at least had the excellent effect of stimulating his mental energy, the result being that the Prelude to the projected poem, *Tristram of Lyoncsse*, was rapidly "thrown off." This Prelude was published in that now forgotten "holiday" book called *Pleasure* in the summer of the following year (1870).

"*December* 22, 1869.

"MY DEAR GABRIEL,

"I am impelled to write on the instant to say how delighted I am to find the Tennysonian seed ('if seed it may be called that seed has none —distinguishable in member, joint or limb') bearing the same fruit in your mind as in mine. Having read a few pages of the *Grail*, I fell at once tooth and nail upon *Tristram and Iseult*, and wrote an overture of the poem projected, all yesterday. My first sustained attempt at a poetic narrative may not be as good as *Gudrun*, but if it doesn't lick the Morte d'Albert,[1] I hope I may not die without extreme unction. If I have time and room I may try your patience with a few lines—but perhaps they had better wait.

"Now, as to *Jenny*, I entreat you not to think of cancelling those two passages—poetically perfect and practically requisite to explain how the man (without being a Laureate or Prince Consort in Wardour Street armour) sits in reverie till morning. The poem is full short, as it is, to carry out the sentiment in a human, actual, and yet spiritual fashion. And (whether or not reducible to hard reason) the ideas so tenderly and nobly embodied in these passages are just such as would, by occurring to such a man as you paint, produce the effect wanted. I cannot imagine who it can have been, as his judgment, you say, deserves your consideration, who started what I cannot but think a most groundless and taskless objection.

"Once again, for heaven's sake think no more of

[1] A favourite expression of A. C. Swinburne's when referring to Tennyson's *Morte d'Arthur*.

so mutilating a poem than of destroying it out of hand. I do not want to see *Jenny*—whose life has not been such as to call down in lightning from heaven *les malheurs de la vertu*—incur without deserving the doom of Justin, or go forth from your cabinet maimed and lacerated, especially as I can hardly conceive that you would yourself be the gainer by any fleshly sense of enjoyment therefrom.

"I felt, of course, the patent objection to the word 'smell'—and I know that I myself, like Baudelaire, am especially and extravagantly fond of that sense, and susceptible to it—but I never thought of your *adopting* my line. That which you now have is perfect. 'Love's exuberant hotbed' is clearly the right reading.

"The new stanza to *Troy Town* is beautiful, and clear gain—though I had never thought of any ambiguity as it was. It is an absurd piece (I dare say) of hypercriticism, but it does strike me that to call a woman's breasts 'the sun and moon of the heart's desire' sounds as if there were a difference between them, much in favour of one. It is a burlesque notion, I know, but would, I fear, occur to others as well as to me, so you must pardon the suggestion of it. 'Heavenly' sheen *stet*—not Orient, I should say, certainly.

"I think I shall without doubt give Ellis for publication my Songs.[1] I had something of the same feeling you express about following in the shining wake of Topsy[2] along the reed-beds of the

[1] *Songs before Sunrise.* The first edition of this volume was published in 1871.

[2] William Morris.

Nile, but with your companionship that will be quite obviated. I hope to finish touching up the outlying poems before long, but some want almost everything but conception as yet, being mere *ova* in the Muse's *matrix*. I am glad you like my new title—I never felt, as William did, *any* objection to it on the score of previous titles used by others. For example, I think of calling the ship which brings Tristram and Iseult from Ireland to her marriage (where they drink the philtre), the Swallow, as a bird of spring and sunshine; and that which is to bring Iseult to his death-bed in Brittany with white sails, or return with black if she does not come, the Swan (this name was obvious, no one could have missed it, but I think the conceit pretty), and because a fine song of Topsy's is called *The Sailing of the Sword*, I am not going to abstain from calling (as I otherwise should) my first fytte or canto *The Sailing of the Swallow*, and my last *The Sailing of the Swan*. Why should I? Do you see any reason? Such a thing, if it be anything at all, must be a compliment of recognition. My poem begins with saying how Love brought these two chosen lovers through

"'Quanti dolci pensier, quanto disio,'

to everlasting hell and honour, between Paris and Helen (as Dante saw them) and Paolo and Francesca, down in

"'Their pale poor world, too deep for sun or star
To live in, where the eyes of Helen are,
And hers who made as God's own eyes to shine,
The eyes that met them of the Florentine,
Eyes heavenly ere they knew her, but when they knew
More and most heavenly their clear godhead grew,
Grew great, and waxed and wonderfully lit
All time for all men with the shadow of it,

> Ah, and these, too, felt on them as God's grace
> The pity and glory of this man's breathing face.
> For these, too, these my lovers, these my twain,
> Saw Dante, saw God visible by pain,
> With lips that thundered and with feet that trod
> Before men's eyes incognizable God.'

As you see, my verse (though the British *buffer* may say I am following Topsy in the choice of metre for romantic narrative) is modelled, not after the Chaucerian cadence of *Jason*, but after my own scheme of movement and modulation in *Anactoria*, which I consider original in structure and combination. On board ship I mean to make the innocent Iseult ask Tristram about the knights and ladies, and tell her of Queen Merganse of Orkney . . . but delicately, sparing respectfully the innocence of her who was to make the first and greatest scandal there of all time—as in days past at Oxford, when we first met, you fellows might have respected my spotless adolescence. Long afterwards, at Camelot, I shall make Guenevere, in a *tête-à-tête* with Iseult, when they exchange confidences about their husbands and lovers, relate how Galahault (Galeotto) brought Launcelot to her first of all in the garden and he gave her *the* kiss—following the French book. I see Molini has a copy for sale—but wants £36! I doubt if Paolo Malatesta gave as much for his. I wish you would give me some day a copy of your version of the Francesca—or, better, print it. I must look up my *Morte d'Arthur*, which I have not at hand, as I forget who comes into the story, and where. If I make use of the comically and Topsaically named Palomydes, should I not call him Palamede, which was presumably his human name? I shall want some telling short episodes, and use them.

"As for Tennyson's Pelleas, you flatter him by calling him a schoolboy who misses the birch. . . ."

Rossetti did not hesitate to follow Swinburne's advice in this letter as to retaining the two passages in *Jenny* which were pronounced "poetically perfect."

> "Like a toad within a stone
> Seated while Time crumbles on;
> Which sits there since the earth was curs'd
> For Man's transgression at the first;
> Which living through all centuries,
> Not once has seen the sun arise;
> Whose life, to its cold circle charmed,
> The earth's whole summers have not warmed;
> Which always—whitherso the stone
> Be flung—sits there, deaf, blind, alone;—
> Aye, and shall not be driven out
> Till that which shuts him round about
> Break at the very Master's stroke,
> And the dust thereof vanish as smoke,
> And the seed of Man vanish as dust:—
> Even so within this world is Lust."

In the days when Swinburne, Rossetti, and Meredith were housemates at the residence in Cheyne Walk, and chanced to gather round the hearth in that drawing-room of the five windows, and also chanced to be in their quizzical mood, their shafts of wit and satire directed against contemporary writers—many of whom they loved well—were irrepressible and frequent. Meredith was already widely recognized as one of the most accomplished wits of his time, and who among those who have read Rossetti's *Nonsense Verses* (which he extemporized by the score, and in which he makes good-humoured fun of many best-beloved friends), or Swinburne's *Heptalogia*, can fail to realize the capacity of these poets for relaxing?

In the opening stanza of *Troy Town* Rossetti exhibited a touch of his own self-reliance in retaining the form of the second line, in spite of Swinburne's dissuasion, and doubtless the retention was justified by the expressive word "heaven-born" in the first line:

> "Heaven-born Helen, Sparta's queen,
> * * * * *
> Had two breasts of heavenly sheen,
> The sun and moon of the heart's desire . . ."

In the following letter Swinburne's interest in the proof-sheets of the forthcoming volume loses none of its fervour.

"HOLMWOOD,
"*February* 12, 1870.

"MY DEAR GABRIEL,

"Two things strike me about *Sister Helen*, that it is really too great a pity to lose the motto from the *Fourcière aux Sorcières*, though it hardly looks well at the head of the poem; couldn't you fit it in at the end of the book with the other one or two (five or six, I mean) other necessary footnotes, so saving the look of the page in each case? And that I don't quite like the name Holm, which seems to me rather of the Clancharlie order, not to say the Linnæan species. I see no reason for altering Keith because of Dobell's song about the real Keiths. Also I deliberately think I should restore for the effect's sake the verses in the much-handled *Jenny*,

> "'Something more
> Than bloodless perking metaphor,'

and fit them on to the next line,

> "'Poor little Jenny—
> You'd not believe,' etc.

as you could do better than I could suggest.[1]

[1] Rossetti promptly restored the lines as suggested.

"The prologue or overture to *Tristram* is finished; I hope you will like a bit in it where I have described Love as having a year with months and signs of the Zodiac of his own, a stanza for each month as sponsor; as thus (having spoken of dead lovers):

> "'Hath not Love
> Bid thought remake their wan funereal fames,
> And the sweet shining signs of women's names
> That mark the months out and the weeks anew
> He moves in changeless change of seasons through
> To make the days up of his dateless year,
> Flame from Queen Helen to Queen Guenevere?'

"I have given each stanza a typical janet colour or flower colour for the light of her 'particular star'—*e.g.*, Francesca's planet is amber coloured, as amber, you know, is made of the congealed tears of the daughters of the Sun for Phaethon. I have put as much fancy and light play of colour into the prologue as possible, to throw out the tragic effect."

The lines, as quoted by Swinburne in this letter from his Prelude to *Tristram of Lyonesse*, were slightly changed before publication.

Although, as Swinburne says, he had now finished his Prelude to *Tristram of Lyonesse*[1] (February, 1870), it was not until 1882—twelve years later—that he published the narrative poem with its fine opening lines in the first canto descriptive of the sailing of the Swallow, the "fair ship" which brings Tristram and Iseult from Ireland.[2]

[1] Before *Tristram of Lyonesse* in its entirety issued from the press, Swinburne gave precedence to no less than eight distinct volumes, which he published as follows: *Songs before Sunrise* (1871), *Bothwell* (1874), *Songs of Two Nations* (1875), *Erechtheus* (1876), *Poems and Ballads* (1878), *Songs of the Springtide* (1880), *Studies in Song* (1880), and *Mary Stuart* (1881).

[2] *The Sailing of the Swallow.*

It was the year after the appearance of his poetic drama, *Mary Stuart*, that *Tristram* at last saw the light.

In the columns of the *Fortnightly Review*, in the month of May, 1870, Swinburne's critique, *The Poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, appeared, consisting of no less than thirty-nine pages.

"I wrote to Morley," he says, "asking if he would give me room in May for a paper on your *Poems*, explaining that I wanted to be early in the field to welcome them at length into light, and did not see any reason to hinder me from doing so openly in the interest of the art. This I put plainly, taking by the throat and spitting in the face of the objection sure to be raised by enemies without a name . . . when a man who has a name, and speaks in that name, comes forward to say the truth about the work of a personal friend. I have not heard from him yet, which I hope means that he is trying to arrange an opening for me in that number. It will be a true and lasting pleasure to me if I do get the chance of saying my say early and fully—frankly it will of course be said, if said at all, without reference to other or older claimants of the first place among living English poets—on the advent of the book, which I regard now, as surely as I did ten years since, as the master-book of this generation of English poetry, at once for depth, variety, instinct, and perfection. That it is inevitably destined to take and keep that place at the head of us I have never changed or disguised my conviction, and never shall. I should say so if the book had in it but four master-poems in varying kinds—*Jenny*, *Lilith*, *Nineveh*, *Sister Helen*. As

to the name in the last, I like Neill very well if it can be plausibly used—I dare say it can—as a territorial name of that ilk. Holm of Holm is *to me* comically suggestive of this present 'ilk' whence I write, and calls up accordingly a paternal figure which never could have come on such an errand from the filial bedside of suffering virtue. And seriously I think I am right in objecting; if there be such a family name, it must belong to the same class as Heath, Holt, Wood, Banks, etc.—highly respectable names, but not suggestive of a baronial house."

When Swinburne came to write his critique in the *Fortnightly Review* on the *Poems*, he reiterated his observation about the "four master-poems," as he calls them—*Jenny*, *Lilith*, *Nineveh*, and *Sister Helen*. He says: "I take to witness four single poems—*The Burden of Nineveh*, *Sister Helen*, *Jenny*, and *Eden Bower*. Though there were not others as great as these to cite at need, we might be content to pass judgment on the strength of these only; but others as great there are."[1]

The title *Lilith*, it should be mentioned, was changed in the proof-sheets to the exquisite title *Eden Bower*.

In a few days (February 22, 1870) came the news from Swinburne that the critique on the volume, *Poems*, was finally settled to be published in the May number of the *Fortnightly*. This critique, which was so widely talked about at the time, and which has been placed by Swinburne with other literary reviews in *Essays and Studies*, may be justly said to express an enthusiasm little

[1] *Essays and Studies*, p. 108.

short of that which he indulged in over the poetic masterpiece of Victor Hugo, "the first poet of our age," as he always named him.

He says in this essay on Rossetti: "The woof of each poem is perfect, and the flowers that flash out from this side and from that seem not so much interwoven with the thread of it, or set in the soil, as grown and sprung by mere nature from the ground, under inevitable rains and sunbeams of the atmosphere that bred them. . . . Among English-speaking poets of his age, I know of none who can reasonably be said to have given higher proof of the highest qualities than Mr. Rossetti, if the qualities we rate highest in poetry be imaginative power, thought, harmony, variety of singing power."[1]

"Together with your letter," Swinburne writes, "comes a note from Morley beginning, 'I shall be glad indeed to have your notice on Mr. Rossetti's poems for the May *Fortnightly*. As for your being a friend of his, that is no reason why you should not both like his poetry and tell us why and how you like it'—*attendo!*—'and why the rest of discriminating people should do the same.' *On va leur dans le*——*!*

"So *that* is settled, and I shall turn to this day, and not leave this for town till all is ready, as I cannot trust myself among friends and temptations with any immediate work on hand which will not wait.

[1] While upon the subject of Rossetti's volume, *Poems* (1870), it may be well to point out that the volume also named *Poems*, of 1881, though partly a reissue of the early work, is by no means identical with it, as many readers of Rossetti's poetry have wrongly surmised.

"Now for details. I quite think, on reconsideration, that I should let the 'sun and moon' stand for Helen's breasts—certainly *not* 'the glowing spheres.' The expression is none the less exquisite for the possible hypercriticism which I, perhaps, unadvisedly suggested. I should certainly not cut out

"'Tis you shall shriek in Latin.'

I cannot even see any way of looking at this passage except as admirably tragic and true, and without the iteration, the realistic force of the 'picture where souls burned' is broken and lost. Pray do not think of mutilation.

"I do *not* like the look of the italics in *The Blessed Damozel*, and I am glad you mentioned that little point. I advise you decidedly to retain *My Sister's Sleep*, for more reasons than one, in spite of the peril of the finality of praise from unmentionable quarters and outlying suburbs of the cities of the plain. It is actually a beautiful and significant bit of early work, worthy of itself to stand. If you omit it, beware lest I set up a public wail for the loss of 'our author's best poem, which he can never hope to equal—while harking back on the traces of *Jenny* and her kind.' It might, after all, be the making of my own reputation as a sheep (or ram) returning to the fold. I should decidedly regret to lose *Dennis Shand*, and think him quite worth his place and his salt as giving vivid variety to the book; and I like his rhymes throughout. For the (fresh) cutting down of Shakespeare's mulberry-tree I do see more reason—it does stand singularly alone in your garden. I had thought, in reviewing the book, to notice it as an instance

in your poetry of humour and association analogous to such examples and interludes in your work as a painter, as the Johnson picture, and making use of it to enforce the evidence of the range and the realism of your genius when you chose to show it.

"I want much to lay before you my late work, as, before the book goes to press, I mean to pass it through a crucible of revision, under the eyes of one or two friends, and, above all, yourself and William, that I may be sure it is thoroughly pure of any prosaic or didactic taint, any touch of metrical stump oratory or spread-eagleism, such as is so liable to affect and infect all but the highest political or polemical poetry. I will have nothing of the platform in it, if possible—and yet, if it is to be a success in its kind, it must be practical, direct, actual in its bearing as Dante's politics and polemics. It is a difficult work, but to me of passionate interest, and I think I am not wrong in rating some work I have lately done at least as high as anything I have yet managed. I shall be curious to see how it takes when published, but fully and honestly content if I satisfy you from the artistic side, as well as myself from the prophetic or preaching side. I trust you to 'cut close and deep,' as the sow gelder in *Swellfoot*, if you find anything to pare away of the spouting or drawling, vociferous or predicative kind. I think, if this has been duly avoided, it may hope to have put enough colour and movement of passion and imagination into the book to make it a serious work of a higher order than a versified pamphlet or leading article. For instance, in *Hertha* I have tried not to get the mystic element side of the poem, from its pure and

free imaginative part, swamped by the promulgation of the double doctrine, democratic and atheistic, equality of men and abolition of gods. You will judge.

"Victor Hugo has written a little poem for *Cassell's Magazine*, and I have translated it line for line—French and English; they are to appear side by side. I was pleased at being applied to as the proper person to do any verse of the Master's into English, and have done my best to stick close at his heels."

In the midst of his anxiety regarding his own work upon the Prelude to *Songs before Sunrise*, Swinburne was busily engaged, while still reading Rossetti's *Poems* in proof, in writing his article upon the book. His letter, dated February 24, 1870, shows how thoroughly absorbed he was at the moment in the forthcoming Rossetti volume. The book had fascinated him; he was keenly desirous of expressing, in the pages of the *Fortnightly Review*, the effect that Rossetti's poetic genius had worked upon his own poetic imagination, and he felt convinced, in this case justified in his firm resolve, as seen in this letter, to say all that he felt; which illustrated one of the most distinctive traits in Swinburne's nature. His emotional overflow is as conspicuous in his critique of the *Poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* as in his various critiques on the work of Victor Hugo. Acutely and subtly critical at his best, too often the cataclysmal verbosity let loose on many occasions overpowered his acumen. His critical power is at its best, however, in the following letter:

"*February* 24, 1870.

"My dear Gabriel,

"I stop writing about you for a little, to write to you in reply to your note of yesterday, and inform you that, having got the chance I have waited ten years for, of speaking out what I see to be truth as regards your poems, I am very particularly and especially well d—— if I am going to let it slip. It is my devout intention to cut it fat—as fat as a carver can cut, and yet retain any grace of handling or skill of dissecting. I shall not say a word which is not the fact. You shall see what it is to fall into the hands of a fellow-craftsman.

"The raging and rancorous jealousy of rival poets is a proverb which you will too soon see bitterly exemplified in your own case as handled by me. Well, look here, seriously, I won't say a thing without deliberation—but I hope I may be eternally saved and go to heaven if I suppress anything I see to be true and therefore necessary to be said. I will immolate between the horns of your altar, neither ox nor ass, nor Tennyson nor Browning, neither the wild goat which is Morris, nor the Paschal lamb which is myself. But I do most certainly mean to say, and show cause for saying, that you have done more work and in more ways of the highest order, as a poet, than I have. I am taking great pains with what I write of you; I have spent hours already in putting together a single sentence or paragraph expressive—as nearly as I can make it adequate—of the character and effect and impression of one set of your poems, and have striven to say nothing inapplicable, nothing of vague praise and spluttering adulation,

but all solid and tangible criticism, which must be met and taken to pieces before it can be answered. And I think I have broken the back of the chief difficulty and set my back with sufficient weight on the first objection sure to be started by envious idiocy—have plugged up at one end the main outlet or orifice whence the British anonym lets fly the emission of his judgments. I have summed up in a swift cursory way the bearings of your great cycle of love-sonnets for *The House of Life*, so as to give such summary analysis as may obviate the charge of obscurity of aim and purport, which to a cursory reader of them by fits and starts was perhaps more or less plausible, but drops off and dies out when they are read as here consecutively arranged by the light of a little thought. This is the only question I can anticipate as possible for 'human stupor' and malevolence to raise as regards the book; and as the cycle in question is, perhaps, for wealth and splendour of poetic body and raiment the most wonderful of your works, I have thought it well to tackle it first. The rest will be plainer sailing.

"I cannot tell you how ineffable in wealth of thought and word and every beauty possible to human work I see that set of sonnets to be on thus laboriously going over them for revision, or how brutally inadequate I feel the best and most delicate comment possible on them to be. You and the British public will have to excuse that. Only Dante could write a proper comment on the verse of the *Vita Nuova*. But I hope to say something more nearly adequate of the other poems.

"Thanks for sending me your earliest extant

poem; the line about the wind and Austerlitz is a very fine promise, it seems to me. I hardly do think the Elizabethan sonnet—though some of the verses are very good—worth a place, perhaps because I am too fond of the dramatists attacked, and differ so utterly from its estimate of them—if it be really aimed at any tragedy of note. Cecco's alias of Nuccoli is most delicious, and the alias of city as well as patronymic infinitely suggestive of inexpressible reasons. What have you done with your elegy on Wellington which the old verses on Waterloo brought to my mind? I want to see it again. I know it was very fine, though a flagrant example of shameless cheek, and historically intolerable to me as being false to 'Fact,' and therefore 'damnable.' Are there any other poems excluded from print which were admitted into the old MS. book? *Can't* you alter (his arrow) '*stood confess'd*' in *Troy Town?* It is so suggestive of the 'Love which a pleasing influence can impart' that it almost sounds like a bit of burlesque.

"And I wish for my ear's sake, which liked the over-syllable, you had not (in *John of Tours*) written 'What's the crying,' etc., and 'It's that John,' for 'what is' and 'it is,' and had left '*'tis* the children wake'—*i.e.*, these sprucifications of structure injure the ballad sound and style, which ought *not* to be level and accurate.

"I am eager to see your revisions, and above all the new lines to Dante about the bones."

"My objection to 'confessed,'" Swinburne continues in his next letter (February 28) referring to

Troy Town, "is that it is a slang word; I should no more use it in the sense of 'apparent' in a serious poem than I should use the word 'skedaddled.' I dare say my objection above is a hypercritical fancy such as one often has, and is worried by, about one's own work as much as another man's, and sees before long to be rot. Would 'his dart looked-on showed fieriest'—or some such superlative expressing the peculiar triumph tragic and significant of it—do at all? If only our language had such a form as hearts deepest—to express that (as the grave gaped for Falstaff thrice wider than for other men) the shaft was thrice deeper in Helen than in other women—Love having shot harder for love of her supreme beauty—or in hope to insure the mightiest and most memorable of all his triumphs. I don't mean that such a phrase would be good if it existed, but that the notion, if expressible, would be pertinent and significant. It is like making Latin verses at school and hunting for the best adjective to fill up your line—but I fancy *the* right and best word is somewhere if we could hit it. Meanwhile, 'confessed' may very well pass as pardonable at a pinch. All this is rather too deliberate a 'fingering about of the parts of speech and wagging them,' to use the disgusting simile of a poet who I am glad to see has repented of it.

"Thanks for your new sonnet, which is lovely. It will make no difference to my critical work that you have—very rightly, as I think—rearranged the cycles of sonnets. I have first said something of the general quality, character, and poetic rank of your sonnets in the mass; then specified half a

dozen (in the first lot between *Inclusiveness* and *Lost Days*) of especial power to be noted for their individual force by the student; then given a careful paragraph to the summing up of the cycle of sonnets on the stages of love from *Bridal Birth* to *Stillborn Love;* then touched on the lyrics of *The House of Life.* Next come brief notices, as full as an article can afford, of the *Dante, Confession,* and *Nineveh;* and I am now tackling you as a Christian poet, author of the *Blessed Damozel, Ave,* etc. In this, as in all work of the kind, I try to keep up a running thread of connection by contrast in comparison of each with each, so as to give something of intellectual harmony and continuity to the essay, and make it, at least to some extent, an artistic exposition of another man's artistic work. This seems the only way to give it any value. I hope and think you will like my manner of exposition thus far, as I certainly have spent more thought and work on it, and put more heart into it, than I ever before did in prose—as you may well believe."

This letter led Rossetti to abandon the word "confessed" in the poem *Troy Town*, and ultimately to construct a verse which satisfied the two poets entirely.

II

VACATION DAYS WITH OXFORD FRIENDS

(1871-1875)

Benjamin Jowett—Edwin Harrison, etc.

THERE were other literary friends besides Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Theodore Watts-Dunton who exercised a salutary influence over Swinburne, through force of congenial fellowship, during this period of the seventies—a period the most crucial in the whole of the poet's life.

Of these friends, Benjamin Jowett must be counted among the foremost. Swinburne had first met this famous Oxford Professor of Greek in 1855, when Jowett became his tutor, an event which led to a lifelong intimacy. Jowett, indeed, was one of the guiding lights in Swinburne's life. It was a friendship that lasted until Jowett's decease—lasted close upon thirty-eight years—as long as his famous friendship with Theodore Watts-Dunton; for Swinburne and Jowett met far earlier in life than did the "housemates" at The Pines.

Swinburne always spoke of Jowett with intense reverence, and frequently declared that he put new blood into the veins of the ancient University. It was during long walks that they had their most satisfying talks together. And what made these

walks so delightful was the discovery, on Swinburne's part, that Jowett was, like himself, utterly fearless. "Burton," he would say, "is a man of nerve, but even *he* doesn't beat Jowett." The physical energy he would display, led by Swinburne up a mountain-side in Scotland, whenever out together on vacation trips, was a thing to witness. Jowett would stand at the edge of a precipice, where even the author of *Thalassius*—bred from boyhood to the scaling of cliffs and the facing of breakers—did not dare to tread.

Their views on literary subjects seldom clashed, the one writer for whom Swinburne failed to awaken in Jowett his own affectionate enthusiasm being Charles Lamb. But Jowett's appreciation of Dickens was a strong link between the two men. On one occasion, Swinburne asked Jowett whom he regarded as the greatest among living English authors—Tennyson, Browning, or Carlyle? His reply was: "If Dickens were alive, I shouldn't hesitate. As it is, I put Tennyson first and Browning second."

Another bond of sympathy between Swinburne and Jowett—perhaps, in their intellectual friendship, the greatest bond of all—was their mutual delight in the works of the Elizabethan dramatists. Jowett, from his profound acquaintance with Shakespeare's dramas, came to be considered by Swinburne as a living concordance to the greatest of poets; whilst, in conversation, Jowett and Swinburne would indulge in friendly rivalry as to who could quote most from memory. The man whose writings served Swinburne most frequently for happy allusions was Dickens. Indeed,

both his letters and talk bubble over with quotations from "Boz": and few men were better qualified to essay Calverley's famous examination paper on *Pickwick;* Johnson, in this respect, was to Jowett what Dickens was to Swinburne. Indeed the Master of Balliol would sometimes laughingly remark, that a concordance to Boswell's famous biography would be for him a more congenial task than even a concordance to Shakespeare.

In talking of Jowett, Swinburne would frequently dwell upon his intellectual greatness. A word of praise from the Master of Balliol of any of his poems, or even a line from a poem, was always treasured by Swinburne almost as deeply as an appreciative word from Walter Savage Landor or Hugo. Hero-worship was engrained in Swinburne's nature.

There was a Balliol man, some seven years younger than Swinburne, who met the poet at one of Jowett's Long Vacation gatherings at Tummel Bridge Inn, Pitlochry, in August, 1871. This man was Edwin Harrison, and he wrote home to his sister at the time: "Swinburne is horribly afraid of the Master." In a certain sense the remark was truthful. But it was a wholesome fear—the fear of an appreciative friend, not that of an enemy.

Edwin Harrison, with whom Swinburne came to be on intimate terms, was a man of remarkable attainments as a scholar. As one of the Benjamin Jowett Brotherhood, he occupies a place of prominence in this interesting period in Swinburne's life. His association with Edwin Harrison, indeed, would make an agreeable chapter in a Swinburne autobiography. He would talk about his

"scholarly friend," Edwin Harrison, with enthusiasm whenever his name was mentioned, always readily endorsing the opinion expressed by the Master, and indeed by all who were capable of gauging Harrison's intellect, that he was a man of extraordinary talent, if not a man of genius.

Edwin Harrison's father was a working mechanic, and his mother had been a mill girl. Educated at the British School, he was, at fourteen years of age, apprenticed to a calico printer. He was eighteen when he began to learn Greek and Latin. When he entered at Balliol College, having gained an exhibition, a brilliant career was expected. And doubtless, but for the fact that brain trouble began to interfere seriously with mental pursuits, the expectation would have been fully realized. He struggled against that terrible brain trouble for the rest of his life. "One year's health," Jowett predicted, "and Harrison will make his mark in Europe." The Master of Balliol took him everywhere, and introduced him to all his friends; and at the Master's house he not only met the author of *Atalanta* (who dedicated a poem to him), but he also met Robert Lowe, Browning, Martineau, and many others of equal fame. "He is the best talker I ever met," Jowett once said to Swinburne, in speaking of Edwin Harrison.[1]

Of that first meeting at Pitlochry, just mentioned, Edwin Harrison wrote: "Who shall tell us of Swinburne's paradoxes and hyperboles, how he set the table in a roar with his recitations of Mrs. Gamp? . . . Jowett is at his liveliest. . . . The

[1] In the *Life of Jowett* he is spoken of as "a most intimate friend of the Master of Balliol."

Master and Swinburne capped quotations from Boswell against each other *ad infinitum.* And you should hear Swinburne chant to us a ballade, of which this is the burden:

> " 'The broom blows bonnie and says it is fair,
> And we'll never come back to the broom any mair.' "

During July and August of the following year (1872), Harrison again met Swinburne at Pitlochry. " He relieves the place wonderfully . . . the other fellows are somewhat silent at table, and the burden of talk falls on me and Swinburne; his paradoxes and extravagances and recitations of Mrs. Gamp are a godsend."

It was the same with Swinburne all through life. And what was still more remarkable, his boyish high spirits showed him at his best when he chanced to be surrounded by earnest-minded, if appreciative companions. His sense of humour grew keenest at the moment when he was brooding deeply over a tragedy. He spent many a playful hour over the game of *bouts-rimés,* with a pile of *Atalanta* manuscript, in which his mind had been engrossed a moment before, on a table at his side. One is reminded of how Rossetti was wont to indulge in humorous anecdotes while busy at his easel giving shape to tragedy as painted in " Pandora " or " Dante's Dream."

In the spring of the year 1873, while on a visit to Jowett, Swinburne again met Harrison at Oxford, and " at the request of the Master " (as Harrison relates in a letter to his parents) " gave up a day to listening to fiendish sonnets against Louis Napoleon, or strolling about Christchurch meadows and discussing Shakespeare, or feeding the poet on

tea and strawberry creams and periodical literature at the Union. . . . It was an amusing day," he concludes, "and repaid my obedience to the Master."

A week later, Edwin Harrison writes:

"The Master preached last Sunday, and I persuaded Swinburne to go with me to Chapel. I was rather sorry for it afterwards; for though the Master was sometimes very good, and in one place paid a fine and ungrudging tribute to John Stuart Mill, the sermon was not as a whole as perfectly put together or so moving as is customary with Mr. Jowett. I dined with the Master on Tuesday. He was very lively. Many notabilities were there, among them Swinburne, Ruskin, Max Müller, and Mrs. Grote. And not only were the 'lions' there, but they roared most agreeably."

A few weeks later (July, 1873), the Swinburne and Jowett fraternity were staying at Grantown, Inverness-shire. "A good place to be in," writes Harrison. "The village is commonplace enough, consisting of one long street, grey, stone-built, clean, and well-to-do, stretching from MacGillivray's lodgings, where we live, to a fine park of pines and beeches. The country is well wooded, and bright with flowers and flowering bushes; Swinburne says he has seen no place comparable with it for flowers except among the Apennines. Our chief pride is in our river, which runs a few hundred yards from the house, though not in sight from it. It is no stream like the Tummel, but a real river, broad and swift, its banks thick with woods, and its edges fringed with wild roses and the yellow broom. One reach is very lovely; and your view is closed

by the distant Cairngorm Mountains, on whose peaks and in whose clefts you see the snow still lingering. . . ."

At Grantown, Swinburne and the Professor took long walks with their friends every day about the neighbourhood. Swinburne always spoke of that trip to Inverness-shire among his many sojourns with Jowett, as being one of the most delightful he could recall to mind.

Edwin Harrison's letter to his family at this date (August, 1873) reads almost like pages from a "Swinburne diary."

"On Sunday we all went to the Findhorn, which I take to be the most beautiful river in Scotland—a stream of swift brown water running in a rocky bed, with trees on either hand that climb to the skies. The Sabbath revenged itself upon us by clouding over in the afternoon, and drenching us to the skin. However, we were none of us much the worse for our wetting. . . .

"On Tuesday the Master and Swinburne and I dined with Mr. Grant, a banker of this place, at a pretty cottage about fifteen miles away.

"There we met Mr. Martineau and his two daughters. Martineau has been ill lately, and his face bears the marks of it. But it is a noble face, nevertheless, and might have been that of some great medieval monk."

III

THE SWINBURNE AND BENJAMIN JOWETT BROTHERHOOD

(1875-1891)

In a letter to Edwin Harrison, Swinburne is anticipating an autumn holiday with the Jowett Brotherhood at Malvern.

"Holmwood,
"*July* 7, 1875.

"I am very sorry," he says, "that the hand of Omnipotence (doubtless for some all-wise and beneficent end) should have been so heavy upon you of late. I myself have been for the last ten days a helpless cripple, having sprained my foot very badly in jumping from a fence.[1] You will not be surprised at my mishap when I tell you (with a blush of conscious guilt) that 'it was' (in the phrase of our Laureate) 'the Sabbath morn.' On this, the eleventh day since my crime and its chastisement, I can just hobble or shuffle about, but I don't know when I shall be able to use my foot freely.

"Just after commemoration I received a note from the Master renewing an invitation to visit him some time in August, which I told him I should be happy to accept. So I hope we may meet again

[1] Vide letter to Watts-Dunton, p. 97.

to take sweet counsel together once more. I may probably have another visit to make first, but I hope that will not interfere. I covet your sea, and *must* get a breath and taste of it somewhere this year. Malvern is woefully waterless, and not to me in itself at all attractive.

"I hope Collins is getting on with his edition of *Cyril Tourneur*. Has he shown you the amazing poem he has unearthed of that worthy's?[1] I had several pleasant day and night meetings with him in town—symposia (if less eloquent, yet) of a chaster kind than Plato's, as indeed (*pace Magistri vostri*) they could not well be less.

"My first (and last) verdict on Tennyson's play was that there was a very pretty song in it.[2] The two last appearances of the Queen are also effective and once or twice almost pathetic—at least, by comparison with the first four acts. It is certainly less exhausting than Browning's libel on Aristophanes. Oh! if we were not now, unhappily, on friendly terms, *what* a Thesmophoriazusæ I might, could, should, and *would* write on *him!* Think how one might work in bits of *Fifine* and *Sordello!* and the disciples, male and female, of the new Socrates —Euripides of London society! I dare not dwell on it, lest the suggestions of my fancy should become *too* Aristophanic. Did you see a letter of mine some time since in the *Athenæum* on an attempt by the Society for the Suppression of Vice to burke Rabelais? It made (as Sir Fretful Plagiary would say) 'some little' sensation for the

[1] *Cyril Tourneur* was edited, with "Critical Introduction and Notes," by Churton Collins, and published in 1878.

[2] Vide letter to Watts-Dunton on *Queen Mary*, p. 98.

moment. The Secretary and Solicitor of that institution walked open-eyed into the trap I had set for him (thus giving the lie direct to his Creator, who has, I must think somewhat rashly, staked his authority on the surely questionable proposition that 'surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird'—even of such grey-goose feathers as this one), and gravely assured me and the public that the S. for the S. of V. did *not* intend to take any measures for the suppression of the Works to which I had taken the liberty of calling his attention and theirs—principal among which were Shakespeare and the Holy Bible. This assurance was delivered in perfect seriousness and good faith. After this, is anything incredible?

"In hopes soon to hear of you all right again and fit for swimming, and to meet you next month face to face.

"Ever yours faithfully,
"A. C. SWINBURNE."

It was while staying with Jowett at Malvern, in August, 1875, that Swinburne heard of Captain Webb's "glorious triumph," to use the poet's own words, in his swim across the English Channel. This swim from Dover to Calais was performed, it will be remembered, in a little less than twenty-four hours. It took place on August 24, 1875. Never had Swinburne been known to exhibit more enthusiasm than when the news reached him of Webb's success. He was in a state of perfect ecstasy during the whole day, and the other members of the Swinburne and Jowett fraternity naturally caught some of the spirit of

rapture from the bard, whose talk was irresistibly inspiring. Edwin Harrison, who was among Jowett's guests, and who, like Swinburne, indulged in swimming, it being also, indeed, one of his favourite pastimes, wrote home about the event and the effect upon that "laureate of the sea"; and the wording of the letter reads like echoes of sentiments uttered by Swinburne in his excited condition of mind over this unique affair. "Are not you all delighted," he writes, August 28, 1875, "with Captain Webb's exploit? It must be the greatest bodily feat ever done since the world was first set spinning. If he had done it in Ancient Greece his countrymen would have crowned him with garlands, kept him at the public cost, set up statues in his honour, and pensioned his children after him."

At the same time Swinburne, still in a state of ebullition over Captain Webb's heroic deed, wrote the following eloquent epistle to Watts-Dunton:

"Ashfield House,
"West Malvern,
"*August* 27, 1875.

"What a glorious thing is this triumph of Captain Webb, and what a lyric Pindar would have written on him! If only I could beg, borrow, or steal the Theban lyre for half an hour I would try at an ode myself. There never was such a subject of the kind even in Greece itself: it is above all Olympian, Pythian, Isthmian, or Nemean fame. I consider it as the greatest glory that has befallen England since the publication of Shelley's greatest poem, whichever that may be. Its hero is the only man among strangers to me personally in England that I would go much out of my way to shake

hands with, if permitted that honour; or, if not, even to see. Jowett himself hurrahed mildly (*ne pas lire* 'wildly') when the news came (I had the pleasure of announcing it), and observed what a supremely great man he would have been in Greece. Man, indeed! he would (and should) have been deified on the spot."

It was at the time of this visit to Professor Jowett at West Malvern (August, 1875), that Edwin Harrison writes to his mother:

"My store of books is increased by three of Swinburne's, which he has been good enough to give me. They are full of genius; full also of that intemperance of thought and language which ruins all he writes. But he is at work upon a Greek play which seems likely to be unusually free from his favourite faults: a chorus which he read me the other day was lovely."

Needless to say, the Greek play was *Erechtheus*, and the chorus was the one which runs:

> "Out of the North Wind grief came forth,
> And the shining of a sword out of the sea."

Swinburne had sent his friend a copy of *Erechtheus* as soon as it was published, and Harrison wrote from Balliol College expressing his great appreciation of the play. Swinburne replied from

"Holmwood,
"*January* 10, 1876.

"My dear Harrison,

"I was very glad to get your letter and to read your remarks on *Erechtheus*, but sincerely sorry and disappointed to receive no better news of your health. I had hoped the Malvern fit of ill-

ness which broke up our plans would have been but a passing touch and left you none the worse. However, I am glad you had a taste of the sea last autumn. So had I, for a few weeks on the coast of Suffolk—quite new to me, except that I had read of it in the *Odyssey* as the shore of Hades. Do you know it? It is unlike any *other* known to me. Fancy a cathedral city, which had its Bishop and members and six great churches, one a minster, and an immense monastery and hospital for lepers—and now the sea has slowly swallowed all but two shells of ruined masonry, and just humble cottages, inn and school included. This is Dunwich—literally built on the sand—on and behind a high crumbling sea-bank. Great fresh-water lakes sweep away inland from the very verge of the sea, parted from them only by pebble-banks and ridges of shingle—a sea without rocks or cliffs, but the worst in England for shipwrecks: all shoals as far as you can see, water thick and gritty with sand. A wonderful country for flocks of strange birds and for gorgeous churches—whole or ruined. I did a good deal of verse there.

"Can you tell me exactly what are the additions to the second edition of Jowett's *Plato?* I have not the means of comparing it with the first, and I want to know *which* are the new essays. I know you have a copy, for I heard him tell Knight to order one for each of us.

"Ever yours sincerely,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

Swinburne's poetic imagination was profoundly inspired by his visits to Dunwich, especially during

this, his first sojourn there, when he was lodging at the "Central Cliff" house, afterwards formed into an hotel. He was impressed by the sight of what remained of the landmarks of that vanished city, and its crumbling cliffs despoiled by the inroads of the sea.

"A land that is lonelier than ruin;
A sea that is stranger than death:
Far fields that a rose never blew in,
Wan waste where the winds lack breath;
Waste endless and boundless and flowerless
But of marsh blossoms fruitless as free;
Where earth lies exhausted, as powerless
To strive with the sea."

* * * * *

"For the sea too seeks and rejoices,
Gains and loses and gains,
And the joy of her heart's own choice is
As ours, and as ours are her pains:
As the thoughts of our hearts are her voices,
And as hers is the pulse of our veins." [1]

There is no doubt that he loved East Anglia, not only on account of his mother's early associations with that part of England, but because its coast in many other places besides Dunwich appealed to him. The marshes to the north-west of the town attracted him scarcely less than Dunwich itself. Parallel with the sea coast the salt marshes extend as far as Walberswick, and this solitary stretch of country further inspired him to write:

"Miles, and miles, and miles of desolation!
Leagues on leagues on leagues without a change!
Sign or token of some eldest nation
Here would make the strange land not so strange.
Time-forgotten, yea, since time's creation,
Seem these borders where the sea-birds range." [2]

[1] *By the North Sea.* [2] *Ibid.*

And so it happened that Dunwich and the neighbourhood, and, indeed, the East Anglian coast in general, became favourite localities for swimming excursions with his housemate at The Pines in later years.

Shortly afterwards Swinburne again wrote to Harrison. On this occasion he sent his friend a copy of *Joseph and his Brethren*, a new edition of Charles Wells' poetic drama, to which Swinburne wrote the long introduction already mentioned.

"*February* 13, 1878.

"My dear Harrison,

"If it were only to exchange congratulations with you on the French elections—to be as well completed as begun, I trust, on this day week—and the impending doom of the 'doomed dog' Buffet (to indulge in a Carlylism), I should find it necessary to acknowledge your note with thanks for its answer to my query. I have read the Master's (Benjamin Jowett) essay on immortality with much admiration, especially of its inconclusive conclusion. As to his defence of the marriage-tie, which has had such an effect (whether commendable or deplorable it is not for me to judge, that I be not judged) on your moral tone, I can only say that I have always defended that institution on the same ground that Mr. Fitzjames Stephen takes in support of the kindred institution—merely as a salutary check on the vulgar propensities of our natural inferiors; but when I hear that a personal friend has fallen into matrimonial courses, I feel the same sorrow as if I had heard of his lapsing into theism—a holy sorrow, unmixed with anger, for who am I to judge him? I think at such a sight

as the preacher—was it not Baxter?—at sight of a thief or murderer led to the gallows, 'There, but for the grace of ——, goes A. C. S.,' and drop a tear over fallen man.

"I am sorry you are still too unwell to read, but hope your improvement will continue as the year goes on. When you do read Joseph [Wells' *Joseph and his Brethren*], you will no doubt find the mannerism to be expected from a poet little more than just of age, but also, I think, enough of genius to make it almost the most remarkable poem ever published at that time of life. I thought I remembered your expressing (at Malvern) admiration of the extracts I published just a year since in the *Fortnightly*, and on the strength of that recollection desired Chatto to send you a copy. Do you think the Master would like one? I should not care to send it unless I thought he would care to read it, and keep it.

"I have just written a poem of some length for a lyric, on the answer sent to Julian from Delphi (A.D. 561) when he sent to consult the god, and was told it was all up with Phœbus. It will probably appear in the *Fortnightly*, and is not, you will doubtless be surprised to hear, in praise of the triumph of Christianity over false gods, but of Apollo, regarded not as the son of Zeus the son of Chronos, but as the spirit of influence, informing the thought or the soul of man with inner light, of which the Sun's is the physical type, and thence with song, or articulate speech, which as the creator of all God is imagined by man to love, or fear, or honour, all who are born and die as surely as they are born at the bidding of the same spirit. Thus

Apollo—Paian—destroyer and healer, and not the Galilean, is established as the Logos which was not *with* but *before* God in the beginning, and is even now beholding the collapse, eclipse, and flight into outer darkness of the god or gods who vainly thought to have ousted him from the world, as well as from Delphi, leaving the said world such deadly glories in the way of song as the *Inferno* and the *Dies Iræ* (which latter I have always considered the typical and capital poem of Christianity proper —and most splendid it is) in place of the living songs of old.

"Ever yours sincerely,

"A. C. SWINBURNE.

"P.S.—I finished yesterday the first rough sketch of the skeleton of the last part of my trilogy of *Mary Stuart.*[1] The matter of every scene, with its interlocutors, is now jotted down in outline, and when this outline is filled in with a few more notes of actual facts and sayings to be worked into the text, there will be no more to do but to write the poem, the least wearisome, though not the least important, part of the job."[2]

On the day on which Edwin Harrison received this letter, with a copy of *Joseph and his Brethren*, he wrote home to his mother:

". . . Swinburne has sent me another book, a drama about Joseph and his Brethren, which was written fifty years ago by a friend of Keats, and

[1] *Mary Stuart* was not published until 1881.

[2] This "skeleton sketch" of *Mary Stuart*, and the writing of the tragedy, occupied Swinburne, in London and at Holmwood, five or six years.

has just been republished after half a century of neglect.

"The author is still living, and Swinburne, struck with the beauty of this forgotten play, has procured its publication, and written a preface to it, in hopes that the old man may enjoy a little fame before he dies.

"I have not felt equal to the labour of reading it, but I caught glimpses of true poetry in cutting the pages."

A letter dated August 27, 1876, is one of the most interesting letters Swinburne ever wrote. It is more than a mere page of autobiography. He describes how he chanced to renew his acquaintance with the *Iliad;* he describes a swimming adventure, full of poetic incidents, off his beloved shore at Bonchurch almost as fateful as the episode at Étretat; he describes his first meeting with Trelawney,[1] and last but not least, his expectation that *Bothwell* is going to be adapted for the stage.[2]

NOTE.—*A. C. S.'s great ambition was to write for the theatre.*

"NITON,
"ISLE OF WIGHT,
"*August* 27, 1876.

"MY DEAR HARRISON,

"The sight of your signature was a pleasure almost as great as the disappointment had been of not seeing you this summer in person. I am very glad you give a good account of the Master's health

[1] It was with Watts-Dunton that he visited Trelawney. See *Life and Letters of Theodore Watts-Dunton,* vol. ii., p. 19.

[2] Vide letter to Watts-Dunton in the *Life and Letters of Theodore Watts-Dunton,* vol. i., p. 125.

and spirits at Malvern, where I should naturally have been delighted to join you, according to his invitation, if my date of engagement here had not been fixed beforehand; but I am very sorry you give no better report of yourself. I should have hoped that summer and the sea might have done for you what they have never yet failed to do for me, whom they always restore (as now) to perfect strength and enjoyment. I have wanted nothing these eight weeks but a companion to be as happy as I ever expect to be. In default of that, I have set myself to wipe out a reproach to which I was ashamed to confess (as I did once to Jowett) that I was secretly liable, and I have read through the *Iliad* from first line to last for the first time in my life (thanks to the stupid system of school drill in detached parts), enjoying some parts even more, but others somewhat less, than I expected. I am not more sure that I do not prefer the *Odyssey* as a whole, but to be sure of this I must read the latter again through, which I did ten or eleven years since, not long after leaving Oxford, when I began to look up my Greek again after an interval.

"I wish with all my heart we were together daily in the sea, where I need not tell you I find myself daily alone, and have many times held imaginary conversations with you, as eloquent and as voluminous as Landor's, while swimming across the bays that divide these headlands. The weather has been usually divine, and the Oceanides as favourable to me as ever to Prometheus; except one day when I went in at a new place after a gale, and found myself unable to get back to land and violently beaten to and fro between the breakers

in a furious reflux, which flung me back off shore as with the clutch of a wild beast every time I tried to get up on the bank of shingle, where at last, by dint of grovelling and digging with hands and feet, I managed, between swimming, crawling, and running, to get out of the 'cludges' of a 'nuss' more tenacious of her patient than Betsey Prig in person. Since then I have kept to the bays I know to be warranted safe within reasonable limits, as I trust you do likewise. On clear days I swim across half-a-dozen various belts of reef, rock, and weed-bed, with broad interspaces of clear sea, and can observe all the forms and colours changing and passing beneath me, which is one of the supreme delights of the sea. This talk of swimming naturally reminds me to tell you that before leaving London, at the beginning of July, I made the acquaintance, and may say, I think, that I gained the friendship, of a very famous old veteran of the sea in that and other capacities, the one Englishman living I was really ambitious and anxious to know: I need hardly name old Trelawney, who is certainly the most splendid old man I have seen since Landor and my own grandfather, though, of course, a good deal younger than these. He was most cordial and friendly in his reception of me, whom he affirmed to be the last of the poets, having apparently no faith in the capacity of this country to produce more of our breed; while I lament to add that he (metaphorically) spits and stamps on the bare suggestion that it did produce any between Shelley or Byron and myself. Of the excellence of his principles I will say but this: that I did think, by the grace of Saban (unto whom, and not

unto me, be the glory and thanksgiving. Amen: Selah), I was a good atheist and a good republican; but in the company of this magnificent old rebel, a lifelong incarnation of the divine right of insurrection, I felt myself, by comparison, a Theist and a Royalist. Another step, and I might have felt myself—but *that* I will not, even in jest, pretend to imagine—I will say, another and less perfect child of the revolution than I might have felt himself by comparison a Christian and an Imperialist. He was full of the atrocities (then just revealed, as you doubtless remember) of New California, and (of course) of passionate sympathy with the exiles of the Commune. Always energetic, whenever he speaks of Shelley the especial energy of his affection is really beautiful and admirable to see. There is some fresh air in England yet while such an Englishman is alive. Did you see his portrait as an old sailor in Millais' picture of 'The North-West Passage,' exhibited this year? A splendid piece of work, and an unmistakable likeness, but, of course, utterly wanting what Reynolds, of course, would have given—the nameless, general air of distinction, and what people call 'birth,' or 'blood,' for fault of a better word, which we ought to invent among us, for it is a very real and actual quality, and as patent in Trelawney as his look of weather-beaten hardihood with which it assorts so well.

"It is hard on post-time, and I don't want to weary you with so long a letter that you will not be inclined to answer it for fear of provoking another; so I will only say that I am glad the winding-up of *Bothwell* pleased you so well; that I,

too, much enjoyed the last and most enormous mare's nest found in it by the sagacious and theosophical *Spectator;* and that a rumour is true (though published in the newspapers in connection with my name!), which you may have heard and disbelieved, to the effect that it is about to be arranged for the stage by Mr. John Oxenford, a playwright of note, as I am told, and will be brought out next theatrical season, when I shall expect all my friends and the faithful in Oxford to rally round it and me.

"Write again, as soon as you can and feel inclined, to

"Yours ever faithfully,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

It was with Watts-Dunton that Swinburne paid Trelawney a visit in Pelham Crescent, where he then resided. He was at that time eighty years of age,[1] but still a man of extraordinary vitality. The old "Corsair's" weather-beaten face in Millais' well-known picture, "The North-West Passage," to which Swinburne refers, is the only authentic portrait of him extant.

John Oxenford, the "playwright of note" to whom Swinburne alludes, was very much to the fore in the seventies. He held the position of dramatic critic to *The Times* for thirty years (1847-1877), producing, during that period, numerous plays, many of which were adapted from the French, *The Two Orphans* being one of the most popular ever produced on the London boards. It is very

[1] Vide *Life and Letters of Theodore Watts-Dunton*, vol. ii., pp. 18, 19.

doubtful if even this practised hand would, had he lived, have ever succeeded in adapting *Bothwell* for the boards. Oxenford died, however, before the next theatrical season (1877) had fairly commenced, and after that date all thought of dramatizing *Bothwell* was abandoned.

For many years the friends lost sight of one another, but in 1890 a letter from Harrison evoked the following from Swinburne—the last communication that passed between them:

"The Pines,
"Putney Hill, S.W.,
"*February* 5, 1890.

"My dear Harrison,

"The pleasure of seeing your handwriting and finding you were pleased by the verses I took leave to inscribe to you (initially) was exceeded—and that is saying much—by the pain of receiving so bad an account of your health. Could you not try change of air, if pain is so constant? Chloral is the very Devil: never in my life before or since have I suffered what I once suffered from taking a very small dose prescribed by the doctor attending me for persistent insomnia. I thank Nature that I did, or I might have gone on with it and died (like a poisoned rat) in a hole. No torture that Dante ever dreamed of was so fearful and maddening—a raging flame of fire inside the skull from temple to temple. Avoid that, anyhow. If I *did* want to commit suicide I would not burn myself at a slow fire.

"We certainly had a memorably jolly swim that day—and what a supper we had the night before,

or rather the same morning! I could not bring in the salmon and duck, though I *never* enjoyed a meal so much, but I never think of them without an oral emotion of Rabelaisian—nay, of Gargantuan—sensuality. How good they were, and how hungry we, to be sure! And what a sleep—and what a waking—we had afterwards!

"You should try the Channel—the sea of seas—and easterly, the best air I know in the world. Watts (who desires to be kindly remembered to you) and I have discovered *the* place for us, and go down annually for two months or so—as I hope to do every year I live. In '88 I persuaded my mother, with my eldest sister, to come down to Worthing (the nearest town), and drive over to visit us and be escorted about the neighbourhood. They agreed with me that it was beyond praise. As for swimming, if you look at the *New Review* of January you will get a faint idea—but as good as I can give—of what it is like in November—not exactly the month in which a man over fifty might be expected to enjoy it. But it is no affectation, for the poem was really begun in my head a little way off shore, out of pure delight in the sense of the sea.

"I shall be sending you my *Study of Ben Jonson* as soon as I have a copy by me. I never worked harder at anything, but I never was better satisfied with the result; and I hope and think that, even if you have never made a study of his plays, you will be interested by my analysis of his prose *Explorata, or Discoveries*. I sent that part of the book (it appeared in the *Fortnightly*) to Jowett, and received a very gratifying letter in acknowledg-

ment, saying that it had set him on re-reading the little book, which he felt sure he must have been first induced to read by my recommendation, and that he thoroughly agreed with my estimate of it. Also (this is, of course, between ourselves) he asked whether I would edit it for the Clarendon Press!!! That I thought rather funny, considering that my connection with Oxford is something like Shelley's or my friend Sir Richard Burton's; but it was nothing to a later note from the hand of the same good and dear and honoured friend, intimating that it would give him pleasure if I would subscribe—as one of his pupils—to some Balliol College concern or other (Rhedycina knows what). I could not but reply that I should be only too gratified by an opportunity to express my personal regard for him as a friend for whose long-continued friendship I was duly and truly grateful; but that, having no sort or kind of connection with the College or the University, I could not presume to present myself among those who had that honour. I must say I thought it *very* odd—though I would not go so far as Browning, who said to Watts that the behaviour of Oxford (alias Rhedycina) to A. C. S. was as bad as her behaviour to Shelley. I don't at all think it bad in either case, but perfectly right and natural. But why Mr. Spurgeon should be expected to subscribe to a testimonial to Mr. Bradlaugh, or Mr. Bradlaugh to a memorial to Mr. Newdigate, I do *not* see.

"Ever sincerely yours,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

PART II

IV

SWINBURNE'S LETTERS TO WATTS-DUNTON

(1872-1876)

Change of publishers—Translation of his poems—Financial questions with publishers and publication of his poems, etc. —Swinburne answers his critics—"Grub Street jockeyship" —His opinion of publishers' catalogues bound up with his works—Criticism of Tennyson's *Queen Mary*—Henry Irving and *Bothwell*—Swinburne's *Parodies*—His enthusiasm over Wells' *Joseph and his Brethren* — *Poems, Three Stages of Shakespeare, Studies,* etc.

IT was at one of Madox Brown's receptions that Swinburne first met Watts-Dunton ("Theodore Watts," as he was then called) and Watts-Dunton had been initiated into the Pre-Raphaelite circle by Dr. Gordon Hake.

The period, 1872, was a particularly vital one in the annals of Victorian Literature. Swinburne, with Rossetti and William Morris in his wake, had begun to overshadow the name and fame of the Victorian Poet Laureate himself. These three luminaries, with a group of satellites clustering around them, came to be known, especially at these Madox Brown receptions, as "The Pre-Raphaelite poets," the tendency among them being to meditate over French models, choosing subjects obviously inspired by the study of the works of Gautier and Baudelaire.

Ford Madox Brown had, as early as 1849—the first definite year of Pre-Raphaelitism—exhibited his "King Lear," a work of considerable dramatic power.

At the Madox Brown symposia in Fitzroy Square, while making one's way into the over-crowded rooms—a spacious apartment on the first floor facing the square, and a smaller room thrown into it through folding doors—one frequently caught the names of these two French poets, Gautier or Baudelaire, and heard their latest volumes quoted and extolled, especially when pausing beside a group of which Swinburne was the centre of attraction. The poet, seated in an old-fashioned high-back chair, would hold forth eloquently in his monotonous, high-pitched voice, his arms dangling at his side, but fluttering unceasingly, like restive wings, from shoulder to finger-tip while he talked. It was this Gautier-Baudelaire craze among these "Pre-Raphaelite poets" that induced Rossetti to advise the *cénacle* "to quit so poor a language as that of Shakespeare and write entirely in French."

Rossetti's attitude at these gatherings was in striking contrast with that of his friend. He seemed entirely lacking in animation, usually wandering about the rooms with his hands thrust deeply into the side pockets of his loose velveteen lounging coat, absent-minded, taciturn, and whenever addressed inclined to be morosely monosyllabic. As a matter of fact, the famous attack[1] by Robert Buchanan was still seriously disturbing Rossetti's mental outlook and diminishing the warmth of his naturally sociable nature.

[1] On *Poems* (1870).

A notable feature of these receptions in Fitzroy Square, was a curious antique style of costume *à la bergère* affected by a feminine coterie—such was the latest development in literary Arcadianism, a fashion that ever since the time of Theocritus in Greece and Virgil in Italy has never ceased to attract.

Swinburne might be met with at Madox Brown's house more often than at any other in London. Brown was a man to whom he had every reason to be sincerely attached: there were few from whom he received greater tokens of courtesy and friendship. Moreover, the people Swinburne met at Fitzroy Square were peculiarly congenial, and that is more than he found at many receptions. That able theatrical critic, Joseph Knight, always interested him, for although Swinburne seldom went to a theatre, owing to his deafness, his fascination for the modern stage, both in London and Paris, never abated.

Another among Swinburne's friends was that pathetic figure, the blind poet, Philip Bourke Marston. Swinburne often used his influence with editors of magazines to find a place for Marston's poems and essays.

Thomas Purnell, the then famous "Q" of the *Athenæum*, was always *persona grata* in Swinburne's case. His caustic criticisms of the contemporary drama inflicted many a *mauvais quart d'heure* upon the playwrights of his time. The true bond of sympathy between Swinburne and Purnell was their hero-worship of Joseph Mazzini.

William Morris, tousled and restless, looked in occasionally to greet his friends, but he was for a

while far too busy working at his newly established business in Queen's Square, Bloomsbury, to spare an evening at artistic receptions. Besides, Morris always preferred, whenever his conscience would allow him to indulge in a leisure time, to run down to Kelmscott with rod and line for a long day's sport on the banks of his beloved Thames.

The man most frequently to be seen at Madox Brown's, and a very warm friend of Swinburne's, was William Rossetti. The affection, indeed, was reciprocal, and to those who knew Swinburne intimately there was never any feeling of doubt that William Rossetti, among his friends, was the man he loved best. From the time of their first meeting in 1858 until the time of the poet's decease in 1909—over fifty years—they never lost sight of each other. It was an affection of the truest fraternal nature. In the case of Watts-Dunton the affection Swinburne experienced was doubtless deep and lasting; but it was on Swinburne's part, at least, more of a filial nature than of that fraternal kind which the poet entertained for William Michael Rossetti.

At the first meeting between Swinburne and Watts-Dunton at Fitzroy Square in the summer of 1872 the poet was in no way impressed; they only exchanged a few words in that crowded studio, with the noisy chatter of Gautier-Baudelaire panegyrics in their ears. Of these two French poets Watts-Dunton knew scarcely anything at the time, and even if he had he would probably have found it difficult to give expression to his sentiments in the midst of so large a group of Gautier-Baudelaire specialists. Besides, Swinburne had

never heard the name of Theodore Watts before that evening, and could hardly have been expected to be in any way particularly interested in an outsider—one seen for the first time at a Madox Brown gathering, and, so far as anyone knew, never seen at any other literary or artistic reception in London. It was not until a night at Madox Brown's dinner-table, some months later, that Swinburne realized that a man of exceptional attraction had come into his life, whose knowledge of literature—notably the literature of the Elizabethan period—was as wide and as thorough as his own. And what proved to be a matter more important, if not more pleasing to realize, Swinburne soon discovered in "Theodore Watts" the man he had been everywhere seeking for—the sympathetic man of affairs.

It so chanced that at this moment Swinburne's publisher, John Camden Hotten, was causing him some trouble and annoyance. He turned to this newly found friend for legal advice. The advice was given and followed up with favourable results, bringing to Swinburne peace of mind for literary pursuits, and at the time in his life when he was most in need of mental quietude.

One of the earliest letters written by Swinburne to Theodore Watts is dated from his father's place at Henley-on-Thames:

"HOLMWOOD,
"*December 6*, 1872.

"DEAR MR. WATTS,

"As far as I can judge, there seems to be nothing for it but to enforce, if necessary, a statement of accounts from Hotten, and get out of all

relations with him as soon as possible, especially after his asserting 'that there is next to nothing owing to me,' in which case it is obviously not in my interest to remain in any business relation with him. I have but one small hold on him; it will depend entirely upon his behaviour when and on what scale I may see fit to let him have my essay on Chapman—which I certainly undertook to write, but made no promise as to time or amount of work; and in case of misconduct on his part I shall assuredly take my own time and judge for myself what I may see fit to do or leave undone, with no reference whatever to his profit or convenience.

"By the same post which brought your letter to-day I heard also from our friend, Madox Brown, of Tinsley's expressed wish to publish for me. I should be very willing to deal with him if his offers were such as seemed to you just and reasonable. . . .

"I am pretty well, and not idle at present. With thanks for your letter,

"I am, dear Mr. Watts,

"Ever yours sincerely,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

With his mind still exercised on the subject of affairs with Hotten, a few weeks later Swinburne wrote again to Theodore Watts:

"*January* 30, 1873.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"I send you the only notes I can find among my papers bearing on the copyright question. This, indeed, as I have said, was never raised, to my knowledge. I understand you to say that

Hotten asserts that I made over to him in perpetuity the copyright of my books 'by oral contract' to the effect 'that he should *always* print and sell them,' so that I cannot take them out of his hands. This is utterly false, and I again challenge him to prove it. You say that in a court of law or of equity a man's evidence for himself 'is not of much account.' Hotten can have none other whatever in support of his allegation of a claim to any copyrights conveyed by word of mouth.

"I am writing to Howell by this post, and rely on his evidence to settle the question on my side of the existence of any such oral deed of gift on my part.[1]

"I will observe your instructions carefully in the event of any cheque received from Hotten.

"In a letter to me from William Rossetti of August 24, 1870, he writes thus as to the question of issuing my *Songs before Sunrise* with Ellis instead of Hotten.[2]

"He (Hotten) is willing that you should name (if you like) one referee and he another, to look into the affair. I put it into the hands of Howell as my representative friend, and he cleared out of my way all supposed (and till then maintained on Hotten's part) claim of Hotten to the issue of my then forthcoming book. I again transcribe a passage from William Rossetti's letter, written while Hotten was still trying to maintain his claim (afterwards given up) to publish my 'Songs' previous to that decisive settlement.

[1] Charles Augustus Howell, the famous art dealer patronized by the Pre-Raphaelite group.

[2] *Songs before Sunrise*, the volume of poems he dedicated to Joseph Mazzini, was published by F. S. Ellis in 1871.

"'Holten says the document in your writing which he possesses is one which you wrote him from Lord Lytton's house (in 1866)[1] after the interview at which Howell and I were present. Howell (he tells me) put into definite written form the agreement, such as he understood it to be, between you and Hotten, and sent this paper to you at Lord Lytton's; and you then forwarded to Hotten some written documents upon which he relies for the support of his cause. He says that, *as you wish to leave him, he does not wish to keep you;* but the separation must be effected under such conditions as not to leave any seeming slur upon him.'

"This is all that bears on the present question, as that concerning the 'Songs' was settled by their publication with Ellis. I hope we may soon be quit of the matter, as I cannot conceive with what weapons he can propose to show fight.

"I had not heard till this morning of poor Miss Blagden's death, which I do now with sincere regret.[2] She was indeed a delightful person; I last met her at the Exhibition of the Royal Academy in the summer, and she seemed in perfect health and enjoyment of life.

"Ever yours sincerely,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

It was during Swinburne's sojourn at Lord Lytton's country seat, referred to in this letter—in

[1] After that visit to Knebworth Swinburne saw little or nothing of Lord Lytton.

[2] The poetess, Isa Blagden, was better known to the public as a novelist than as a writer of verse. Her stories, *The Cost of a Secret* and *Agnes Tremaine,* attracted considerable attention in the sixties.

the early autumn of 1866—that his disquieting connection with the publishing house of Moxon was brought to a sudden close, and his business relations with John Camden Hotten's firm were commenced, a relationship which proved even more disquieting. It was at the very moment of his visit to Knebworth that Swinburne, finding his newly published volume of *Poems and Ballads* suddenly withdrawn from circulation by Moxon without any warning being given him, consulted with Lord Lytton as to the best course to pursue. Moxon was panic-stricken over the hysterical reviews which the critics, governed by their gregarian instinct, wrote disparagingly one after the other concerning the book, raising a perfect moral whirlwind that went the round of the press.

The withdrawal of *Poems and Ballads* from publication, however, was only momentary. It was quickly arranged that the book should pass into the hands of J. C. Hotten, together with the other two volumes of Swinburne's in Moxon's list, *Chastelard* and the *Queen Mother and Rosamund.* Hotten reissued *Poems and Ballads* with a title-page of his own, but without placing thereon the words "Second Edition." It was not until 1878 that Messrs. Chatto and Windus—J. C. Hotten's successors—brought out the "Third Edition," as it was called. In these later editions of *Poems and Ballads,* be it noted, not one line of any one of the previous editions was suppressed, and yet, when the sheets passed into Hotten's hands, booksellers got it into their heads that certain portions of the volume had been withdrawn by Swinburne, and that the first edition—the "Moxon" edition—was

consequently very rare and valuable compared with subsequent editions.

This popular error Swinburne in a somewhat lengthy letter (published in the *Athenæum*, March 10, 1877) emphatically refuted the statement that any of the poems originally published by Moxon had been altered or deleted. "There is not one piece, there is not one line, there is not one word, there is not one syllable in any one copy ever printed of that book (*Poems and Ballads*) which has ever been changed or cancelled since the day of publication. . . ."

When J. C. Hotten died (June, 1873), the late Mr. Andrew Chatto, Hotten's manager, took over the business, and his house, Chatto and Windus, have continued to publish the works of A. C. Swinburne ever since that date, the whole affair having been arranged at the time by Watts-Dunton on Swinburne's behalf.[1]

In reference to Miss Blagden and her work, Swinburne added a few weeks later: "You may certainly put me down as a subscriber for a copy of Miss Blagden's verses. Though I only met her twice, I retain a clear recollection of her agreeable qualities and a sincere regret for her loss."

This volume of Miss Blagden's collected poems was published (1878) soon after her decease, with an interesting and pathetic memoir by Mr. Austin Dobson. Italy was the land of Isa Blagden's adoption, but she came over to England on visits to her friends about every three years. It was during these visits in her later years that she met Swinburne.

[1] Vide *Life and Letters of Theodore Watts-Dunton*, vol. i., pp. 113 114.

With his thoughts already beginning to turn to the publication of *Essays and Studies*, Swinburne writes:

"HOLMWOOD,
"*June* 5, 1873.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"I am rather distressed between the contrary advice of different friends, to wait or not to wait. I should like to publish the 'Studies' at once if they would have as fair chance of prosperity now as after a success in another field;[1] but there comes the question, What is the book to contain? How much, for example, of the *Notes on the Royal Academy of* 1868? Some of that half pamphlet I should like to preserve, as I remember Rossetti expressed himself pleased with the criticism of himself, and I think there is some good writing in it; but I should not care to reproduce the whole as it stands. Then, as a collection of my prose essays, the book ought certainly to include *Under the Microscope*,[2] which I wish I had published in the *Fortnightly* last year instead of a separate pamphlet. To the title I should add 'Fragments of a Prose Dunciad,' and perhaps add to that, with 'Excursions,' so as to cover the episodes on Byron, Tennyson, Whitman, etc., with perhaps a note or two and a postscript. Then, should I do well to reissue my 'Notes' on my own poems exactly as they stand, or with excisions and alterations, or only an extract or two from them? All these questions I should want to talk over first with a friend. Can you help me with your impressions of all or any?

[1] *Songs before Sunrise* (1871). [2] Published 1872.

"Give my best love to Rossetti, and tell him how much I enjoyed his lovely poem in the *Athenæum* of the week before last. I hope he is at work still in both fields.

"Ever yours sincerely,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

The poem by Rossetti to which Swinburne refers at the end of this letter is the one called *Sunset Wings*, that appeared in the *Athenæum*, May 24, 1873, of which the first of the six verses runs:

"To-night this sunset spreads two golden wings
Cleaving the western sky;
Winged too with wind it is, and winnowings
Of birds; as if the day's last hour in rings
Of strenuous flight must die."

The following letter shows Watts-Dunton already giving his aid in connection with Swinburne's *drames épiques*. It was during the time that the play was passing through the press.[1] *Bothwell* was the first work that his new and appreciative friend heard Swinburne read in manuscript at his bachelor gatherings in his rooms at 3, Great James Street, Holborn.

In the years that followed the publication of *Bothwell* no composition of Swinburne's, in prose or poetry, ever went to the press until Watts-Dunton's verdict on the work had been sought for deliberately.

"HOLMWOOD,

"*January* 30, 1873 (? 1874).

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"I send you the accompanying proof to return to Chatto, that you may see if the printing

[1] *Bothwell* was published by Chatto and Windus in 1874.

arrangement of the stanzas of those thrice unhappy songs at pp. 16 and 17 is now corrected clear enough (and the right signs made). Of course, the first line of each stanza ought to be printed on a level with the second line, with which it rhymes, *not* as if the 1st, 3rd, and 5th rhymed together, as it looks now as if they did. . . ."

The first stanza in that song runs:

"Sur la grève
Rien ne rêve
Aux naufragés de la nuit;
À la trombe,
Gouffre et tombe,
Au flot qui frappe et qui fuit."

In a postscript to the same letter Swinburne says:

"A thousand thanks—thankless that I am to have left them to the last—for your next kind and wise note of counsel concerning tradesmen and their bills. 'Wisdom of your word is made,' as I have said elsewhere of Pallas. But I want things squared with . . . only because he won't send me any more of the books I want till they are. Such is the present excess of human baseness, and such the weltering abyss of social anarchy in which we live, that this demoralized Mammonite, whose all would be at my disposal—his life and his property alike—in a commonwealth duly based on any rational principle of order and good government, actually requires money for goods supplied to *Me*. How long, O Lord? But the trodden worm will turn, and then let Trade and Capital *trrrremmble!*

"Of course I infer that it is quite settled that the *Gentleman's Magazine* is never, while published by

Chatto and Windus, to contain any line from Buchanan. Is it not so?"

The following letter, having reference to the translation of his works into French, is characteristic as showing with what pride he always remembered that he had French blood in his veins—his great-grandmother having been a "lady of the house of Polignac." The reference to Tyndall is equally characteristic in another way.

"The Orchard, Niton,
"*August* 29, 1874.

"My dear Watts,

"I have just received a note from Chatto informing me of an application made to him by a Monsieur Rynaud, who wishes to know the conditions on which he may translate into French the whole or a portion of my works. Should I approve of the proposal, Chatto would be very glad to negotiate the business details of it, and to make the best bargain he can for me and hand the proceeds to me without any deduction. To this I have replied expressing my satisfaction at the prospect, and saying that I must of course rely on him and on yourself for information or suggestion as to what might be thought the equitable terms on which the matter might be arranged on my side. But naturally, if it were never to bring me a penny of pelf, it would gratify me beyond measure, and more than any other form of success or compliment could possibly do, to see my works in a thoroughly good French translation. Apart from my quasi-national feeling of patriotism for the foster-country of my ancestors and the mother-country of the Revolution, it would be an admirable test of the

vitality of my work. The criticism of a foreign country, if based on real and competent knowledge, makes one able, as it were, to profit before dying by the verdict of posterity—an opportunity by which I suppose that only Goethe, Byron, and Hugo have ever yet had a chance to profit. I intend to ask leave of the third of these to inscribe to him, if it really is published in full, the complete edition of my translated works.

"I am most truly sorry, though I never met him personally, for the death of Sydney Dobell. I had never ceased to hope that I might some day be able to express my admiration of his genius on the appearance of some work which might at length do it justice; and now, if I do find or make occasion to say anything, it will be what he will never hear.

"If I write any more necrological elegies on deceased poets, I shall be taken for the undertaker's laureate or the fore-horse of a funeral cart hired out to trot in trappings on all such occasions as regularly as Mr. Mould and his merry men, and shall feel like Borola in *The Duchess of Malfi*.

"My mind is very full just now of Tyndall's magnificent address, which I have read with great care and greater admiration. Science so enlarged and harmonized gives me a sense as much of rest as of light. No mythology can make its believers feel less afraid, or look to be reabsorbed into the immeasurable harmony with but the change of a single individual note in a single bar of the tune, than does the faintest perception of the lowest chord in the whole system of things. Even my technical ignorance does not impair, I think, my power to see accurately and seize firmly the first

thread of the great clue, because my habit of mind is not (I hope) unscientific, though my work lies in the field of art instead of science; and when seen and seized even that first perception gives me an indescribable sense as of music and repose. It is Theism which to me seems to introduce an element —happily a factitious element—of doubt, discord, and disorder.

"I think I told you that since I have been here I have read the *Iliad* through for the first time with great comfort and benefit to my spirits,[1] which have been also recreated by constant exercise in the sea to such an extent that I caught my face in a glass looking yesterday as it did twelve or fifteen years ago rather than, as it does in London, with thinned hair and withered cheeks. I swim in among the other seagulls now daily, and feel exactly the same enjoyment, and as much of it, as I did at thirteen, unqualified by any afterthought of possible trouble except what might be inflicted by the too strenuous embraces of the Oceanides, who did one windy day refuse to disengage or release me for some few minutes from a raging reflux, that dragged and hurled me off shore, to get beaten or choked to death literally within arm's length of the shore; but, as you see, I scrambled out. Since then I keep humbly to the bays I know to be far more trustworthy.

"Ever yours sincerely,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

Nothing, however, came of the translation of Swinburne's *Works* by M. Rynaud. Watts-Dunton

[1] Vide Swinburne's letter to Edwin Harrison, dated August 27, 1876, p. 66.

was opposed to the notion; and in after years at The Pines never gave encouragement to would-be translators of Swinburne's poetry, for he was always strongly averse to translations except by foreigners (so difficult to discover) with an exceptional knowledge of the English language.

Swinburne was now seriously occupied, as seen in the following letter, in arranging the various material for *The Songs of Two Nations*, which he was passing through the press. On this matter he wrote:

"HOLMWOOD,
"*January* 30, 1875.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"Thanks for your note and account of interview with Chatto. As you say nothing about financial questions, I presume there is nothing to be said or done; and that Chatto proposes to pay at the year's end according to the sale of these three books: *George Chapman, Politicals, Essays and Studies.* Is this so; and if so, is it all right?

"I have just received revised proofs of the political verse-book from pp. 17 to 77 (the end). Did I send you the first proof of 16 pages, or was it that of *Atalanta?* Whichever it was, I suppose it is now again in Chatto's hands or the printer's. I am half doubtful whether a book of which two-thirds have already appeared in book (or pamphlet) shape, and the remaining third has also been previously in print, ought to have a new title. I do not like even to be accused of such a trick of Grub Street jockeyship as the attempt to pass off old wares under a new name. The title-page might very well bear the three names of the three com-

ponent parts of the book in succession, one beneath the other; but what to put on the back so as to indicate the new matter as well as the old I cannot think. One thing I should wish Chatto to observe, which I doubt not you will think reasonable: that I object to having his (very miscellaneous) catalogue appended to any volume of mine. He will see that no such publisher's list is ever tacked to the tail of a book of Tennyson's or Browning's, and I do not wish to set the fashion of allowing my poems to be bound up with an advertising catalogue. Besides, it gives a sham bulk to a small book which is calculated to disgust purchasers—like any other sham as easily detected. Perhaps you will let him know as much in time before a new book of mine appears; from you it will come with a double show of authority, if you agree with my reasons.

"I am going to tax your kindness with another little personal commission, if you find time to do me the service of looking in at my chambers. I thought I had brought away with me last month, but I must have left on my writing-desk, a letter (in Italian) signed G. Chiarini, which should long since have been answered, and which I mean to answer as soon as I can send the writer the volume containing the *Dirœ*. I hope it has not got blown away or burnt, as Mrs. Magill is generally careful; I know it was left loose on the outside of the desk with other letters and papers which I brought away.

"Ever yours sincerely,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

The volume Swinburne speaks of in this letter which he was preparing for publication, and of which two-thirds had already appeared in "book (or pamphlet) shape," he ultimately decided to call *Songs of Two Nations* (1875), and to include *The Song of Italy*, a *Hymn of Praise* in honour of Mazzini (originally published in 1867), *An Ode on the Proclamation of the French Republic after the Fall of Napoleon III.*, and a few sonnets under the title of *Dirœ* relating to the Italian struggle for independence from the rule of Austria.

In this book Swinburne's political views are given as a sequel to his opinions already set forth in *Songs before Sunrise*.

Two days later he writes:

"*February* 1, 1875.

"My dear Watts,

"Do you think these eight lines will do to head the forthcoming book? and which, if any, of these titles do you think appropriate? *Songs of Two Nations* (I think I prefer this), *Songs* (*or Poems*) *in Time of Change, Songs* (*or Poems*) *of Birth and Death.* Chatto ought to have the leaf I enclose and (if you approve) these 'motto' verses in a day or so—indeed, as soon as possible. Help, now or never!

"Which do you like best of the two readings? I prefer the second ('fear' and 'near'), if it be permissible to end one line with *near* and begin the next with *fear* again. But the sense is bettered by the repetition.

"Ever yours,

"A. C. Swinburne."

The "eight lines" referred to are as follows:

"I saw the double-featured statue stand
Of Memnon or of Janus, half with might
Veiled, and fast bound with iron; half with light
Crowned, holding all men's future in his hand.

"And all the old westward face of time grown grey
Was writ with cursing and inscribed for death;
But on the face that met the morning's breath
Fear died of hope as darkness dies of day."

These were, for Swinburne, unusually busy days even in that busiest period of his life. Having settled about the publication of the *Songs of Two Nations*, he wrote to Watts-Dunton on the subject of *Essays and Studies*, which he was resolved upon preparing for the press without further delay:

"*May* 10, 1875.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"Beside my contributions to the *Fortnightly* since '67, I have published nothing to speak of that I remember in prose (barring, of course, the 'Blake') but the prefatory Essays to volumes of selections from Byron and Coleridge—published respectively by Moxon and Sampson Low—my pamphlet of 'Notes' on my volume of '66 (Hotten), the second half of the pamphlet on the Academy Exhibition of '68, by W. M. Rossetti and myself, and *Under the Microscope*. I should like to talk the matter over with you or some competent friend and ally, and determine how much of all this to reissue, and how; with what, if with any, corrections, repressions, additions, and changes. In each of these there may be something worth keeping, yet I must consider before putting forth the whole bundle of essays—or, as I think of calling the book simply,

Critical Studies—without revision or rearrangement. Also it had occurred to me that the reissue would have a better chance of success with the public, if not with the journals, if it were to appear on the heel, as it were, of a new and important poem such as *Bothwell*, which might have refreshed interest and conciliated good will for what I should next put forth by way of reprint.[1] At present the dogs would be like enough to fall on and rend it; if *Bothwell* had made its mark, they could hardly dismiss it without some attention. There would, of course, be no difficulty with Morley as to publication—that was from the first agreed upon between us—and I think I should apply to him as counsellor on the question of what to expect for the first issue of the book.[2] If you write again within a week, address to the care of the Rev. the Master, Balliol College, Oxford, where I am going to-day to meet a Bishop and a Dean.

"Yours very sincerely,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

This volume of *Essays and Studies*, forming a collection of critical articles, was written at intervals during a space of some seven years. It treats of the *Poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, the article on Hugo's *L'Homme qui Rit* and *L'Année Terrible*, his review of William Morris' *Life and Death of Jason*, and Arnold's *New Poems* (1867). His *Notes*

[1] *Essays and Studies* was published by Chatto and Windus in 1875.

[2] There was some talk at the time of *Essays and Studies* being published by Chapman and Hall. The idea, however, since Chatto and Windus had taken over the publication of Swinburne's works, was abandoned.

on Designs of the Old Masters at Florence came to be written through the chance of spending many days in the Uffizi on the study of its several collections in 1864; and his other notes *On some Pictures in the Royal Academy of* 1868 is also included in this volume.

Swinburne speaks with great appreciation in the "Notes" of D. G. Rossetti's works. He refers to the "study"—at that date, indeed, only a sketch—of what afterwards developed in that famous masterpiece, "Dante's Dream." "It is taken from the *Vita Nuova*," Swinburne remarks, "Dante in a dream beholding Beatrice dead, tended by handmaidens, and Love, with bow and dart in hand, in act to kiss her beautiful dead mouth." He speaks of this sketch as giving promise of great beauty.

Under the Microscope, after mature deliberation, was omitted. It was the much talked of pamphlet, published in 1872, to which Swinburne in this letter makes reference, and embodied his reply to the attack on Rossetti and himself by Robert Buchanan in the notorious article, *The Fleshly School of Poetry*,[1] which the author signed under the pseudonym of "Thomas Maitland."

The illiberal journalists of the period censured Swinburne severely for venturing to write too enthusiastically, in these *Essays and Studies*, of Rossetti and William Morris. He expressed his resentment thus: "Twice only have I had occasion to review some part of the work of two eminent poets whose friendship I had enjoyed from my early youth: a fact which, in the opinion of certain writers, is more than sufficient to disqualify me from passing

[1] Vide *The Contemporary Review*, October, 1871.

any sentence on their work that may be worthy of a moment's attention. The accident of personal intimacy, it would seem, deprives you of all right to express admiration of what you might allowably have found admirable in a stranger." All Swinburne claimed in *Essays and Studies*, as he has unhesitatingly declared, was that his criticisms gave frank and full expression to what were, at the time of writing, his sincere and deliberate opinions. "I have desired above all things to avoid narrowness and dogmatism. . . . My chief aim, as my chief pleasure in all such studies as these, has been rather to acknowledge and applaud what I found noble and precious than to scrutinize or to stigmatize what I might perceive to be worthless or base."

In his letter dated June 21, 1875, Swinburne wrote:

"HOLMWOOD,
"*June* 21, 1875.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"Please send me E. C. Stedman's article on me out of *Scribner's Magazine*,[1] which you bore off in triumph one day from my rooms. I want my people to see it. In haste,

"Ever yours,
"A. C. SWINBURNE."

A fortnight later Swinburne writes:

"*July* 7, 1875.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"I have been laid up for a whole week in bed with a badly sprained foot, and am still a helpless

[1] 1875, vol. i.

cripple, having hurt my left foot eleven days ago in jumping from a fence (N.B.—It was the Sabbath morn)—rather a schoolboyish mishap for a man of my reverend time of life. (By the by, have you seen the Etonian epistle in the July *Macmillan?* I have been exploding with laughter over it on my bed of pain; it refers *just* to my time, and I dare say I knew the writer.)

"I have often wished to sit down and talk to you by letter (*faute de mieux*), and now steal a half-hour from the time that should be spent on my critico-biographical notice of Beaumont and Fletcher for the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, which is but half done, and must be finished within ten days from this, so I cannot 'flow forth' as I should like—also it is nearly post-time.

"I am surprised at the reception of my 'Essays' by the press—the *Pall Mall* and *Spectator*, which never before agreed except in abuse of me, now agree in my praises![1] What can be their import? I hope you will be able to find out from Chatto how the book sells, and how our account generally stands. I shall want money soon; and it really looks as if he had deliberately tried to *burke* my essay on Chapman; I never see, or have seen, it advertised anywhere.

"As for Tennyson's 'play,' my first and last remark on it was, and is, that it has a very pretty song in it. The two last scenes in which the Queen appears seem to me well above the somewhat low level of the rest—really rather effective and pathetic. But isn't the press fun—above all, the incomparable *Spectator*, which sets it high

[1] *Essays and Studies* (1875).

above the ordinary work of Shakespeare, and only a little lower than his highest? And yet I am not very much alarmed at the advent of this conquering rival, and I *am very* sorry for poor Irving.

"Ever yours,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

When Swinburne jestingly made reference to Tennyson as a "conquering rival," he was thinking of his own project of adapting *Bothwell* for production at the Lyceum, to follow the Laureate's *Queen Mary*, which had recently been published as a book as well as in an abridged form for theatrical representation.

In a certain sense there never were two poets, whether "conquering rivals" or not, than were Swinburne and Tennyson, more desirous at this mid-Victorian period, of bringing about the "staging" of their poetic plays—plays never written with serious thought while at work upon them as to any of the essentials needed to obtain success in stage representation. With so strong an ambition to succeed as dramatists, one might have imagined that these poets would have given more attention to the structural requirements of the "acted drama." Whether Swinburne's ambition in this direction was due to a sense of vanity or to the spirit of emulation so frequently apparent in his actions throughout his life is not an easy problem to decide. But, as a matter of fact, the author of *Bothwell* sought Henry Irving's acquaintance there and then, and was, as a consequence, invited by the actor to a luncheon at the Garrick Club for a serious talk over his lately published tragedy. The

introduction was brought about by Theodore Watts-Dunton, and at that luncheon *Bothwell* and the possibility of its adaptation for stage representation at the Lyceum was seriously discussed. Judging from what Watts-Dunton told one of his friends on the day after that meeting between poet and actor, Swinburne did all the talking; never was Irving's mood more taciturn on any occasion. He was all attention, "struck dumb with admiration," Watts-Dunton declared, by the brilliancy with which Swinburne discoursed upon the Elizabethan dramatists.

That meeting at the Garrick Club, the first and last between Swinburne and Irving, led to no satisfactory result. *Bothwell* was too "unadaptable." Besides, Irving had experienced a severe ordeal in his venture but a few months earlier in the part of Hamlet. By the introduction of Shakespeare's plays into his *répertoire*—and with marked success—a new era in his histrionic career had begun. To have ventured upon the production of *Bothwell* would have been an ordeal beyond the endurance of an actor with Irving's abnormally nervous temperament, and the project of bringing out a condensed version of the *drame épique* was abandoned.

Some ten days later, Swinburne, who always made it his invariable rule, from this time forward, to send Watts-Dunton all the Chatto and Windus accounts, wrote as follows:

"Holmwood,
"*July* 17, 1875.

"My dear Watts,

"Herewith I send you (as usual) Chatto's half-yearly account, which arrived lately with a

cheque for the poor balance in my favour, and with it I forward a new prospectus from the Rev. Alex. Grosart, with which reverend person I have of late had a good deal of very (and I hope mutually) agreeable correspondence. He wants his 100 subscribers to this new series (which, as I had to tell him, is quite beyond my means, though I should have liked to go over at least the two first authors) to be men of culture and intelligence, not 'gilded fools' who waste their superfluous money on rarities which they cannot use or understand, but scholars who can appreciate a scholar's labour; and sympathizing both with this desire and with his undertaking, and being much in his debt for the really splendid present of several of his former books, I comply with his request to make the project known, which I think may best be done by submitting it to you, who are likelier in London than I am here to fall in with people who might desire and deserve to become subscribers and share in the enterprise, hoping, too, in any case that it may interest and amuse you to look over the prospectus as far as it goes.

"I particularly want you just now to send me as soon as possible the MS. or copies (so long since faithfully promised, but faithlessly unperformed) of my parodies, *John Jones* and *The Poet and the Woodlouse*. I have no full copies, and if you want them back you shall have them; but I want a sight of the complete original text of these works at once.

"I have just had a note from your friend Mr. Williams,[1] including one from the ancient of days

[1] The Mr. Williams to whom Swinburne refers is the late W. S. Williams, of *Jane Eyre* fame, who was for many years

known, or rather unknown, to mankind as Wells, in reply to a tardy response on my part, and announcing the new edition of 'Joseph' as forthcoming almost immediately. Now I remember that years and years ago Rossetti had a pen-and-ink design intended, I believe, to serve as a frontispiece to a projected edition of 'Joseph' which never forthcame; and though I have not mentioned it to Williams in my reply, it struck me as possible that the first rediscoverer of the poem and introducer of it to me might like to know of its reappearance in time, perhaps, to carry out, if he pleased, his former purpose. Very likely he may know of it already through Williams or yourself; in that case, I have wasted but a minute of my time and yours.

"My crippled foot still chains me within doors; you I hope soon to hear are all right again.

"Ever yours,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

Regarding his "parodies" touched upon in his letter, it was not until some five years later (1880) that Swinburne published the book anonymously. He called it *Specimens of Modern Poets: The Heptalogia, or the Seven Against Sense; a Cap with Seven Bells.* In this volume Swinburne imitated himself as well as the Poet Laureate, Robert Browning, and others. This attempt at anonymity, however, did not succeed in preventing the poet from being unmasked.

Swinburne's allusion to *Joseph and his Brethren* brings to mind his enthusiasm over this poetic

literary adviser to the house of Smith, Elder and Co., and who took a deep interest in Charles Wells' *Joseph and his Brethren.*

drama the moment the book was brought to his notice by Rossetti. Rossetti had stumbled across a copy of the volume as early as 1846, and so strongly was he attracted by the poetic qualities of the work that some two or three years later he made every effort to discover a publisher who would undertake to bring out a new edition. He even went so far as to offer to make illustrations for it.

Wells' "Joseph" was first published by Whittaker and Co., Ave Maria Lane, Paternoster Row, in 1824, under the pseudonym of H. L. Howard, the author being at the time barely twenty-four years of age. No sooner had Swinburne read the drama than he not only endorsed the opinion expressed by Rossetti and others, that Charles James Wells was a poetic genius: he surpassed them all in his admiration of the author, placing him on the same level with the greatest among Elizabethan dramatists, and in some respects even on a par with Shakespeare. The tribute was thoroughly characteristic of Swinburne, both in its generosity and extravagance.

When Swinburne's attention was drawn to "Joseph" by Rossetti, he endeavoured in the first instance to awaken interest in the literary world by mention of the work in his critical essay on Blake in 1868, dwelling upon the "dramatic passion," "the dramatic characterization," etc., to be found in "Mr. Wells' great poem." Two or three years later Swinburne conceived the idea of writing an essay on the "unknown poet," and having completed it, handed the manuscript to Watts-Dunton with a view to its publication in some magazine.

The manuscript lay in Watts-Dunton's desk for another two or three years. At last, however, it occurred to him to approach Messrs. Chatto and Windus in regard to the publication of the long-projected new edition of *Joseph and his Brethren*, suggesting that Swinburne's essay on Charles Wells (now disinterred) and his play, might be used as a preface. Messrs. Chatto and Windus agreed to undertake the issue, pointing out, however, that the essay should be first printed in some magazine, in order to attract attention to the book beforehand. This was easily arranged, Swinburne being now famous as the author of *Atalanta*. It appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* in February, 1875, and was much talked about in the literary world; and in the following year (1876) the poetic play, "Joseph," which the author had through Rossetti's persuasion revised and greatly improved, was given the chance of finding its right place in English literature.

It was at the moment when Messrs. Chatto and Windus were bringing out their edition of *Joseph and his Brethren*, and when the author of *Aylwin* was writing his critique on this poetic drama for the *Athenæum*,[1] that Swinburne wrote to Watts-Dunton about his recollections of Charles Wells.

"HOLMWOOD,
"*March* 11, 1876.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"All I know of 'Joseph' or of Wells, except the letter I enclose (which please return when done with), I owe to D. G. R. It makes me (even me for once) quite sentimental to open the first scene

[1] Vide *Athenæum*, vol. i., 1876.

of the second act. I was but just out of my teens when I first knew him, and one of the first debts I owed to his past friendship was the acquaintance of this poem. I can hear the very intonation of his voice as he began reading it out from the opening of that scene

> ("'Wear this gold chain.'
> 'You honour me, my lord.')

to me, devoutly listening; and so on by the hour. I had come up from Oxford, and we were alone in his old rooms over Blackfriars Bridge. Then he lent me the MS., and in vacation time I carried it far and wide; read it (all the best of it, as D. G. R. had done to me) aloud to my dear friend Lady Trevelyan (another one now lost, but only by death, not estrangement, of which there never was a shadow between us), who admired and enjoyed it as heartily as she did all good things in art or poetry. Years after, Wilson the bookseller sold me a copy he had picked up for sixpence.

"I am afraid you will be disappointed to hear that this is all I can tell you. Wells' letter to me you saw, and remember *he* says there were at the time several favourable notices of the book; but I never saw it mentioned except cursorily in Horne's *New Spirit of the Age* (I think), and enthusiastically (I know) in a note to Wade's *Poems* (184–). Scott has this book.

"Ever yours sincerely,
"A. C. SWINBURNE."

In his *Fortnightly* essay on "Joseph," Swinburne says, in this "Scriptural drama" there are "lines even in the overture which might, it seems to me,

more naturally be mistaken, even by an expert in verse, for the work of the young Shakespeare than any to be gathered elsewhere in the fields of English poetry. Take these of the setting sun:

> "'A god gigantic, habited in gold,
> Stepping from off a mount into the sea.'"

A third edition of *Joseph and his Brethren* was brought out in "The World's Classics" in 1908, in which Swinburne's Introduction was reprinted from the edition of 1876, together with a lengthy "Note" of exceptional interest "on Rossetti and Charles Wells," by Theodore Watts-Dunton.

In a brief letter Swinburne refers to his old friends Burton and his wife, who never failed, when in England, to visit him, years before he went to live at The Pines, where they were in later years frequently entertained as the guests of the two poets.

"*August* 29, 1875.

"I hope Burton is all right again by this," Swinburne writes; "give all manner of good messages from me to him and Mrs. Burton when you see them, and warmest congratulations on the general triumph of her book as far as one may judge by reviews.

"How lovely were both versions (I know not which lovelier) of D. G. R.'s sonnets on his own pictures in the *Athenæum*!"

The book by Mrs. Burton (afterwards Lady Burton) to which Swinburne alludes in this letter which had recently appeared was *The Inner Life of Syria, Palestine and the Holy Land* (1875), compiled from her private journals. Swinburne

took scarcely less interest in Lady Burton's literary work than he did in Burton's own "travels."

He had one serious grievance, however, against these friends. Both Sir Richard and Lady Burton, through their predilection for Turkish cigarettes, put Swinburne's friendship to a test that threatened a breach between them on more than one occasion. They were, among all his friends, the only two to whom smoking in his library was not absolutely interdicted, and even in their case he would vow, while throwing his window wide open the moment they had taken their leave, not to invite them again upstairs into his study; but he never carried the threat into execution. He excused them on the plea of frequent "expeditions to the East," the bad habit of smoking Turkish cigarettes having been acquired in those "foreign parts."

The mention of Rossetti's "sonnets on his own pictures" refers to the verses that had just appeared (August 28, 1875) in the *Athenæum*. Among the "sonnets for pictures" which the poet-painter wrote, *A Sea Spell* was a favourite one of Swinburne's. He would often quote:

> "Her lute hangs shadowed in the apple-tree,
> While flashing fingers weave the sweet-strung spell
> Between its chords. . . ."[1]

Swinburne, however, could not resist indulging in his impish sense of humour when he wrote his parody, *Sonnet for a Picture*, in the *Heptalogia*:

> "That nose is out of drawing. With a gasp,
> She pants upon the passionate lips that ache
> With the red drain of her own mouth, and make
> A monochord of colour. Like an asp,
> One lithe lock wriggles in his rutilant grasp. . . ."

[1] The oil-painting by D. G. Rossetti, entitled *The Sea Spell*, was executed in 1876.

The following letter refers to a projected "swimming expedition," to the Isle of Man with Edwin Harrison, which was abandoned owing to his friend being too ill at the time to join him in the holiday trip:

"HOLMWOOD,
"*September* 7, 1875.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"Here I am again, after all, my tour to the Isle of Man having been upset by the illness of my intending companion.

"I hold over my Shakespeare MS. till I hear again from you, as of course to send it to Morley would be to throw over my chance of an American arrangement. As you say nothing about my other MS. now *on sale*, I suppose there is nothing to be said, or I should like to have your opinion on the matter. I am really sorry you had so much trouble trying to unearth my burlesques.

"Ever yours,
"A. C. SWINBURNE.

"P.S.—Would you do me the kindness to order a copy of the *Tombeau de Théophile Gautier*, to be sent me here, by D. Nutt, your near neighbour, with whom I have an account?"

Swinburne was at this moment principally occupied in his "Study" comprised in *The Three Stages of Shakespeare*, for publication in the *Fortnightly Review*, his design having been "to examine by internal evidence alone the growth and expression of spirit and of speech, the ebb and flow of thought and style, discernible in the successive periods of Shakespeare's work."

A few days later, Swinburne writes to Watts-Dunton on the subject of his book of memorial verses, *Le Tombeau Théophile Gautier*, published in 1873. This book was incorporated in *Poems and Ballads* (second series) in 1878:

"SOUTHWOLD,
"WANGFORD,
"*September* 22, 1875.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"The book directed to your care is the last copy that Mr. Nutt had of the *Tombeau de Théophile Gautier*, which is now out of print and fetches a fancy price. I did think of sending it as a present to Mr. Grosart by way of some small return for his very handsome gifts, containing as it does the only verse of mine which I suppose he has not seen; but unless Lemarre at Nutt's instigation should at last see fit to send me a copy (should any be remaining in private stock) by way of tardy and only recognition of my contributions, I hardly think I shall part with this one, as it will probably never be reprinted, and would therefore be irreplaceable. If you should leave it at my rooms in passing, perhaps you would let them know that it is not to be forwarded, but to wait till my return. I arrived here yesterday, after ten miles of very slow coaching with such very long delays that I could have walked it in less time: have not tasted the sea yet, as the day is dirty and dull.

"I shall hope to hear from you as soon as may be convenient on two of the sundry points we left half discussed, as they are of immediate importance: (1) the question about the *New York Independent* (is not that the paper?) and the reissue of my

Shakespeare essay,[1] of which, as you know, a fresh instalment is ready for Morley when you can let me know how that matter stands; (2) the rearrangement of my two volumes in the next edition, dividing them into two classes—*Poems and Ballads* and *Early Poems*—as proposed in my letter to Chatto on the subject, now in your hands. He tells me the matter is pressing, as the present edition of *Poems and Ballads* is nearly exhausted. I think you expressed yourself satisfied *for me* with his arrangement about publishing my songs with music —*i.e.*, £3 3s. per song to be paid through him by the composer wishing to publish.

"Ever yours,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

"HOLMWOOD,

"*January* 2, 1876.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"First, accept the best of good wishes for the new year, and, secondly, the expression of my satisfaction that, of all my poems now in your hands, it should be *The Two Leaders* that you have chosen for appearance in the *Athenæum*.[2] I found, on the night of my reading (yesterday fortnight), that William Rossetti would have preferred the *Academy* as the place where my verses on his daughter's birth should appear, but understanding that it was then proposed to bring them out in the *Athenæum*, had no dislike to that arrangement. Now the editor of the *Academy* has repeatedly solicited a contribution from me. As I had to

[1] *Three Stages of Shakespeare*, published in 1880 under the title of *A Study of Shakespeare*.

[2] 1876.

write to-day, I thought of mentioning this little matter, but on second thoughts refrained till I should have taken counsel (as usual) with you. As I wish, and I think W. M. R. would like the poem to appear about this time, and as MacColl has taken another in its stead, and so cannot consider himself defrauded of it, I should be very well pleased to see it in the *Academy* at once, if the editor chooses to pay up for it. I think a poem by me of 10 stanzas and 100 lines ought not to be worth *less* than £20; what do you think? If this proves satisfactory, which I suppose there will be no difficulty in ascertaining, I shall expect the MS. sent me with the proofs for correction; this was not done with *The Two Leaders*, which, however, with the chance help of a 'foul copy,' as schoolboys say, I think I have got right; but in the other case the MS. will be absolutely necessary to me. Of course, if *you* wish to keep it, I can afterwards return it to you.

"Remember that I hold myself wholly at your disposal (whenever it may be); wire to summon me up to a conference in town on the adaptation of *Bothwell* to the stage. Of course I look forward to the occasion with some interest, and of course an interview under your auspices will be necessary: exchange of ideas by letter would be profitless and endless.[1]

"Ever yours,

"A. C. SWINBURNE.

"Let me hear what you think of the new instalment of my Shakespeare study; I hope you will not find it too 'diffuse' this time.[2]

[1] Interview with Irving at the Garrick Club.

[2] *Three Stages of Shakespeare.*

"P.S.—Another thing I wanted to mention was this, which I had nearly forgotten in thinking of *Bothwell*: that if you can (as you seemed to think was possible) be the means of reopening to me the British Museum Reading Room, it will be a great kindness to me and a great service and furtherance to my future work, especially on Elizabethan and Shakespearian matters, where I constantly feel the want of the B. M. library for purposes of reference. And in this case, as in that of *Bothwell*, the sooner anything can be arranged the more agreeable it will naturally be for me.

"A. C. S."

In Watts-Dunton's library at The Pines there was a copy of *Bothwell* (first edition) which was the copy Swinburne began to revise with the object of making it the basis for the acting edition; it contains numerous deletions, corrections, and annotations in pencil and in ink, several of which are in Swinburne's own handwriting. This interesting copy of Swinburne's tragedy was sold by Messrs. Sotheby, by order of Watts-Dunton's executors, in March, 1917.

V

SWINBURNE'S LETTERS TO WATTS-DUNTON

(1876-1877)

Mary Stuart—Essays on Charles Lamb and George Wither, etc.—His dependence on Watts-Dunton — Criticism in the *Quarterly* of Swinburne's *Essays and Studies* — Robert Buchanan and "The Fleshly School of Poetry"—Professor Minto and the *Examiner*—Swinburne's generosity and kindness of heart—*Study of Charlotte Brontë*—Maria Rossetti and *The Shadow of Dante*—*Note on the Muscovite Crusade*—William Morris and the "Eastern Question"—His "loyalty as a Frenchman" — Bulgarian atrocities—Governor Eyre and the negro rebellion in Jamaica—"Foul breath of babble," etc.

ON the eve of a flying visit to London, Swinburne writes:

"HOLMWOOD,
"*February* 19, 1876.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"On Monday morning I propose to start by an early train, or if I miss it, by a later one whether or no, for one day in London. I had thought of running up in the morning to see the Old Masters at Burlington House, and down again the same evening, without dropping in anywhere; but on receiving your very welcome letter of this morning I thought I would take my chance of securing an evening's comfortable talk with you if possible, which entails, of course, a night in town.

But I may so far anticipate our meeting as to answer your query about the *République des Lettres* at once. I expect the third number will appear in March, but not having received the second one I am not sure as to the date or system of publication. All I know is that I have returned my proof with the very few corrections necessary for the French printers, who apparently are not chosen, as ours evidently are, for superior incompetence and ignorance of reading, writing, parsing, spelling, and punctuation. *Of course* Minto is more than welcome to announce it in his 'Notes and News.'

"Ever yours,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

Whilst in the midst of his work on the tragedy of *Mary Stuart*, Swinburne writes:

"*March* 11, 1876.

"I snatch an hour from the Babington Conspiracy to answer your letter at once; the play must wait for another morning. . . .

"I shall certainly bring Wither with me when I come to town, and we will examine it carefully throughout. Besides the undoubted autograph pencil-notes of Lamb, there are several questions as to the pen-and-ink writing which I want your help to resolve. *Some* of this, too, is L.'s, whose pen and pencil handwriting are incredibly (at first sight) dissimilar, and his published letter about this very book only makes confusion worse confounded. Some of the indubitable puns in pencil are of priceless worth, and as different as my worst scrawl (such as this letter) from my best writing."

Of his essay, *Charles Lamb and George Wither*, upon which he was occupied at this date, he says:

"If there be one part of his work more delightful than another—more delightful (if that be possible) than the very *Essays of Elia*—it is to be found by readers who are fit to relish it in their fugitive notes and marginal observations, which have all the bright fine freedom of his most fanciful letters, and all the clear swift insight of his subtlest criticisms. For their behoof only who feel as I feel the charm of the slightest and lightest among such fragments of commentary and strays of annotation, I have undertaken to give a fuller account than has yet been given of Lamb's remarks on Wither and his editors or critics. To others the task will seem idle, the result of it a profitless collection of 'trivial fond records'; a gleaning after harvest, a skimming of skimmed milk. Those only who care to glance at it, for whom alone it is intended: those only who would treasure the slightest and hastiest scratch of the writer's pen which carries with it the evidence of spontaneous enthusiasm or irritation of unconsidered emotion or unprompted mirth.

"There are now before me the two volumes of selections from the lyrical and satirical poems of George Wither, rather meanly printed, in small octavo proof-sheets, interleaved with quarto sheets of rough thin paper, which are made precious by the manuscript commentary of Lamb.

"Ever yours,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

In a postscript to this letter Swinburne writes:

"The manuscript of *Erechtheus* is now awaiting your pleasure in the drawer of the *little* table at my rooms."

From this period Watts-Dunton became custodian of the Swinburne manuscripts.

"HOLMWOOD,
"*March* 31, 1876.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"You now have, I think, all my recently written unpublished original poems in your hands. When am I to hear the last word about the appearance of the old-garden poem?[1] Either this or the lark-song (I forget its name) in dancing double rhymes, or the enclosed Ballad accompanying the L. O., is of itself more appropriate as a contribution than *The Last Oracle;* but I leave the decision with you, as well as the question of costs. . . .

"Send me word by return to say the accompanying MSS. (*Last Oracle* and *Ballad of Dreamland*) have arrived safe.

"Ever yours,
"A. C. SWINBURNE."

Showing how completely he had come to depend on Watts-Dunton in regard to all details connected with his affairs, Swinburne again writes:

April 9, 1876.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"I received the enclosed proof, with the copy, yesterday. I did not return it to Chatto, because I had not heard from you that you had come to any final arrangement with him about my pro-

[1] *A Forsaken Garden* was published in the *Athenæum*, July 22, 1876.

posed contribution. I should have preferred the appearance of the two shorter poems on the same terms, as the more suitable to the magazine (as I said in my last note), but of course I don't object (if you think fit) to the insertion of this one. You will get this, of course, on Monday morning before you see Chatto, and will know better than I what to do and what to say.

"Many thanks for the offer of ticket and company to the Blake Exhibition. Surely there must be some, I should think many, things new to me, judging by W. M. R.'s prefatory note in the *Academy*. Is the catalogue not procurable? I want very much to see it. Don't forget to remind me in time before it closes.

"I *don't* know Appleton well enough to write to him about Wells.[1] Week after week I look eagerly for a notice in the *Academy* and the *Examiner*, and throw them down in disgust at finding none, and wait another week in the heart-sickness of hope deferred.

"I thought your article decidedly the better for revision, and very interesting. Where did you get the information about his other early 'scenes,' written at Horne's instigation, and quality of his talk?[2]

"Is the *Quarterly* out yet? I await its onslaught with great equanimity; but pray tell Chatto to be sure and let me have it on the day of publication.

"Ever yours,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

[1] Dr. Appleton was editor of the *Academy*, from its start in 1869, and remained editor until his death in 1879.

[2] Vide *Athenæum*, vol. i., 1876.

The article in the *Quarterly* (1876) upon reviewing *Essays and Studies*, which Swinburne was "awaiting with great equanimity," was certainly not pleasant reading, for it proved to be an "onslaught" not less severe than the poet anticipated. It shows that the writer takes an almost entirely opposite view to that taken by Swinburne in his volume; for he discovers none of that extraordinary merit which Swinburne perceives in his criticism of Victor Hugo's *L'Homme qui Rit*, or in his *L'Année Terrible*. Rossetti's *Blessed Damozel*, in his opinion, contrary to the opinion expressed by Swinburne, is devoid of true imagination, and Morris' *Jason* wanting in dramatic power. He argues that he (Swinburne) adopts a purely technical standard of judgment, ignoring those standards which are fixed in the constitution of our common nature, admiring Victor Hugo for the ingenuity and invention he displays in the manipulation of vast ideas, not for a moment allowing that all ideas, to be really great and permanent, must be founded in experience and common sense; he disapproves of Swinburne's rhapsodies over the skill with which Rossetti *paints* abstract ideas, caring nothing for the relation which these ideas bear to the heart and feelings, and considers that Morris wins the poet's praise, not for the sublimity or pathos of his creations, but for the dexterity with which he has divested himself of the character of his own age, and expressed himself with something of the manner of antiquity. In a word, the critic adds, what Swinburne admires is not so much effect as display; he has fixed his whole attention on the mechanical symmetries of art, without calling into account the

inward harmony of the soul, and the consequence is that both "his own work and his praise of the work of others, compared with our initiative perception of what is right, and with the work of those who have best satisfied this perception, produce the sense, so foreign to all true art, of labour, excess, and disproportion."

In June, 1876, Swinburne was called upon to make his appearance in London, owing to his close connection with the famous trial: the action for libel brought by Robert Buchanan, the well-known novelist and poet, and author of the notorious article in the *Contemporary Review* entitled "The Fleshly School of Poetry," to which was appended the pseudonym of "Thomas Maitland."

"HOLMWOOD,
"*June* 19, 1876.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"I have just received the subpœna from Shaen and Roscoe, with an intimation that the case may come on to-morrow. I write this to Putney in case I should not find you at Dane's Inn when I come up this afternoon. Hoping at least to see you the first thing in the morning,

"I am ever yours,
"A. C. SWINBURNE."

The trial, Buchanan *v.* Taylor, lasted for three days (June 29 and 30, and July 1, 1876). It took place in the Common Pleas Division of the High Court of Justice.

P. A. Taylor, M.P., was proprietor of the *Examiner*, and the action brought against him by Robert Buchanan was to recover £5,000 as

damages for alleged libel. The case was tried before Justice Archibald and a special jury. Mr. Charles Russell, Q.C., and Mr. McClymont appeared for the plaintiff; and Mr. Hawkins, Q.C., Mr. Mathew, Mr. Robert Williams, and Mr. Warr were for the defendant.

The jury, after twenty minutes' consideration, returned a verdict of £150 for the plaintiff.

The article — *The Devil's Due* — which was the direct cause of the action, was written by Swinburne in the form of a letter, and actually signed "Thomas Maitland," the pseudonym, as already mentioned, adopted by Robert Buchanan in his article, "The Fleshly School of Poetry," in the *Contemporary*.

Concurrently with the appearance of Swinburne's article in Minto's journal, *The Devil's Due* was printed in pamphlet form, but suppressed immediately, for rumours of legal proceedings against the proprietor of the *Examiner* soon began to leak out.

Professor Minto, one of Swinburne's most intimate friends, was editor of the *Examiner* at the time; and, as may be imagined, the affair created no slight sensation among literary circles in London.

At this period Swinburne was devoting much of his time to an elaborate study of Shakespeare; and Watts-Dunton's sympathy and profound knowledge of the subject proved of inestimable service in the never-tiring researches the work entailed.

"*July* 20, 1876.

"My dear Watts,

"Can you tell me the exact title, date, and author's name of the Essay on the *Character of*

Falstaff, published in the latter years of the reign of Dr. Johnson, who made it the subject of a good joke which was also (as usual) a bad criticism? I am just now elaborately completing my own study on that great subject, and the reference would be of use to me;[1] and all the lovers of Sir John owe a debt of honour to Mr. (? Maurice) which I for one will not leave unpaid, though I know his book only by summaries. I wish I could fall in with a copy.

"I think you will like both some verse and prose I have been and am now at work on. I have found much to say of Shakespeare's relation to Rabelais, both in the way of contrast and in the way of sympathy.

"Also I want to take counsel with you as to a little project which I think might be worth trying to carry out. Very frequently, in the course of rapid reading, I come upon something I should like to make a note on—a note no longer than this, but which might now and then be here and there illuminative; *e.g.*, there is a passage in Matthew Arnold's essay on Wordsworth which sounds somewhat like a courteous and friendly challenge to me on perfectly fair and open grounds, and which, therefore, I should like to answer in as few words, and of course in the same tone and spirit. Again, I am now reading for the first time Halliwell's reprint of a comedy (date 1608) illustrative in several passages, it seems to me, of my own remarks on certain points of metre and phraseology in the earlier plays of Shakespeare. This sort of thing is just what would be worth while noting in the interest of real (not sham) Shakespeare students—

[1] *A Study of Shakespeare* (1880).

and *not* worth more than a short paragraph of notice, such as I might formerly have thought of sending to the *Athenæum*. Now, would the 'Table-Talk' of the *Gentleman's Magazine* be a good place for such waifs and strays of 'marginalia'? The fact of the publisher being Chatto would be an advantage in more ways than one—and probably, I presume, to both of us. Drop me a line to say what you think of this.

"Ever yours,

"A. C. SWINBURNE.

"Do you know anything of Léon Clodel? As far as I have got into his new book—*Boshommes*—I am half fascinated with admiration, and almost want to review it."

Swinburne, in his allusion in this letter to his "elaborate study" of Falstaff, is at great pains to prove—as he surely succeeded in doing—that "Sir John" at heart was in truth no coward. "In the very first scene," he remarks, "which introduces us to the ever dear and honoured presence of Falstaff, his creator has put into the mouth of a witness no friendlier or more candid than Ned Poins the distinction between 'two as true-bred cowards as ever turned back, and one who will fight no longer than he sees reason.' In this nutshell lies the whole kernel of the matter—the sweet, sound, ripe, toothsome, wholesome kernel of Falstaff's character and humour.' He will fight as well as his princely patron, and, like the prince, as long as he sees reason; but neither Hal nor Jack has ever felt any touch of desire to pluck that

'mere scutcheon' honour from the pale-faced moon."

Swinburne, in this instance, sets the "verdict of his own judgment" for once, and with reluctance, in regard to the "imaginary cowardice of Falstaff," against the opinion of no less a critic than Victor Hugo himself.

The Sailing of the Swallow, as the first canto of *Tristram of Lyonesse* is called, was a great favourite with Watts-Dunton. In a letter dated October 2, 1876, Swinburne writes in reply to a letter from his friend reminding him of his promise to make him a present of the manuscript. From this date (1876), when he promised to give Watts-Dunton the autograph manuscript of *The Sailing of the Swallow*, Swinburne presented almost all his manuscripts to his "friend of friends," the moment the "copy" left the printers' hands. In the later years, indeed, at The Pines, a carefully examined typed copy (never the original manuscript) was sent to the printers, so that the autograph manuscript "might escape being stained by the compositors' inky fingers," as Watts-Dunton would remark.

"I will send you the manuscript of the First Canto of 'Tristram' as soon as I can lay my hand on it, which I fear will not be in time for this post. I only hope it may not be (as probably it is) left in my desk in London, of which I have carried off the key."

In the same letter he goes on to say: "Catulle Mendés, who married the daughter of Théophile Gautier, has sent me a splendid edition of his Poems which puts our press to shame. I have only had

time to see at a glance that they are full of beauties."

This exquisitely printed volume by the famous French poet and dramatist, in which Swinburne took so great an interest, was the volume published in Paris at this date entitled *Les Poésies de Catulle Mendés*. Doubtless the interest he expressed was enhanced by the fact that the book was dedicated to Victor Hugo.

The letter that follows is not only an example of Swinburne's generosity and kindness of heart, but also of the unprecedented appeals to his kind and complaisant friend for aid in all matters, whether of slight or whether of serious importance, during the days the poet passed at Holmwood. On this occasion the worry was in connection with a tippling landlord.

"HENLEY-ON-THAMES,
"*November* 7, 1876.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"Yesterday, on receiving a letter on the subject from a fellow-tenant at No. 3,[1] I wrote as he suggested, a note to the landlord, protesting against the removal of poor Mrs. Magill for an act of brutality on her husband's part from which she was the first person to suffer, and bearing witness in the strongest terms to her excellence as a servant, her attention in time of illness, her readiness at all times, her perfect trustworthiness and obliging qualities—putting it at once as a matter of common justice that the poor woman should not suffer *further* from another's fault, and even as a matter of personal obligation to be conferred on myself,

[1] No. 3, Great James Street, where *Bothwell* was written.

in common with the other lodgers, that we should not be deprived of her services. If, after all, this should be unavailing, may I ask you to take charge of a cheque for £5 from me as a present to the poor good woman, which thus need not fall—as if sent straight to her it might—into her husband's hands? 'Tis pity of him,' too, for, when sober, he is one of the very best and most attentive servants I ever met with. My epistle ought to be of some avail, for I never wrote such an elaborate holograph. Copperplate was to it what this friendly and familiar scrawl is to copperplate. It was well worth £5 in the autograph market if it was worth the paltry penny stamp outside.

"I have three!!! little favours to ask for myself when you have a spare minute to grant them. . . ."

Swinburne's desire to write his *Study of Charlotte Brontë* was now awakened by the "Letters" in *Macmillan's Magazine*.

"*November* 17, 1876.

"My dear Watts,

"I presume you have read with as much interest as I the last instalment of Charlotte Brontë's correspondence. If I have time and spirit for the work, I think of taking it as the text for some brief discourse on her, which might perhaps find a corner in the *Athenæum*, either as a whole or in the form of necessary detached notes and fragments of remarks. . . .

"Could you find time to look in at my rooms and send me the September number of *Macmillan* (containing the first instalment of C. Brontë's

letters), which I left behind and cannot get on without—also news as to poor Mrs. Magill and the result (if any) of my late interests on her behalf?"

"Ever yours,

"A. C. S.

His allusion to Charlotte Brontë's correspondence is in reference to a monograph by T. Wemyss Reid, in nine chapters, in the September and October numbers of *Macmillan's Magazine* for 1876, giving an interesting sketch of the life and letters of the author of *Jane Eyre.*

It was in answer to Watts-Dunton's letter announcing the decease of Dante Rossetti's sister, Maria, that Swinburne wrote on November 29, 1876. Her death had occurred on the 24th of the month at All Saints' Home, in Margaret Street, Regent Street, where she had long before contemplated ending her days as a member of the Sisterhood. Although Swinburne was never very intimate with Maria Rossetti, her book, *A Shadow of Dante* (Dante considered mainly from a religious point of view), had attracted him at the time of its publication in 1871.

"*November* 29, 1876.

MY DEAR WATTS,

"I need not say how sincerely I was grieved by the news which I received yesterday from you, nor how touched and gratified by the message conveyed in it. I have no time, even if I had the right words, to say more on the subject but that I trust the rest of the family, and especially Miss Christina and her mother, are as well as may be hoped under the circumstances.

"I must add a word on business of my own. Having been long since solicited to say something on the 'Eastern Question,' and being unable to join in the popular view of the case expressed, among others, by our friend Morris, I feel impelled to publish a few words which I am now setting in order. The appearance of Carlyle's letter in *The Times* has at length decided me. Now I want to know in what *daily* paper I can publish my letter. I have no knowledge of, or interest with, anyone connected with *The Times* or *Pall Mall*, either of which I should prefer to any third journal. The *Daily News* would probably decline to publish a letter on the anti-Russian side. Therefore, if no better may be—as I *must* speak at once if at all—I must publish it as a sheet or tiny pamphlet with Chatto. But I should prefer a newspaper."

"Ever yours,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

The three following letters deal chiefly with Swinburne's *Note on the Muscovite Crusade*, and are interesting as incidentally exhibiting his views on the Bulgarian Question.

"HOLMWOOD,
"*December* 8, 1876.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"I hope you will not grow as weary of the sight of my handwriting as I am always delighted by the sight of yours. In that case the present would be a grievous infliction indeed. Let me only beg you to waste no time in reading the accompanying manuscript, but transfer it at once to Chatto on any terms you think fit. When you

read it in print, you will observe (1) that I have throughout spoken of the Ancient Enemy (the first letter of whose name, to borrow a bad joke from Marlow, begins with Carlyle) in terms of such general respect and admiration as will assuredly displease Jowett for one, branding the revilers of his character and genius in even stronger terms than I used to denounce his opinions.[1] (2) That I have exceeded the forbearance of the Psalmist, who only kept silence even from good words, though it was pain and grief to him; whereas I, under circumstances of extreme temptation, have actually kept silence even from bad ones, and abstained from imitating in the remotest degree the noble daring of at least one article in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (that most respectable organ of high culture and good company) by any faintest allusion to the historical or traditional reputation of the Bulgars, and the now (I believe) universal European significance of their very name. . . .

"It must be as a reward for this super-Christian virtue of forbearance on my part that Jowett is coming here on a visit next week. I would a great deal that you, too, could be coming to meet him; but, as you know, my father's age and my mother's health make me shy of asking leave to invite (supposing he could and would care to come) even the *nearest and best friend I have in the world* who is as yet personally unknown to them. Next month I am bidden to a huge festival of full five hundred guests invited by Jowett afore-named to the opening (or, as the Bulgarians who write for *The Times* would 'atrociously' say, the inauguration)

[1] Vide Chapter V., "Swinburne and Jowett Brotherhood."

of his great new hall in Balliol College. I much hope that Matthew Arnold may be there, especially as you see he has just complied at last with my so long slighted request, and republished his exquisite (is it not exquisite?) early poem of *The New Sirens*—which probably you knew before, even if not (like me) almost by heart. I remember Gabriel once telling me he liked it much better than anything else of Arnold's; but those two admirable poets, to my lifelong perplexity and disgust, can see nothing almost in each other's work to admire or enjoy. 'It is really singular,' as Madame Sevigné's candid and charming old friend said to her, 'that I should be the one only person I know in the world whose judgment is invariably right'—is it not?

"Ever yours,

"A. C. SWINBURNE.

"P.S.—I hope you will be able to send me Karl Blind's address in a day or two (but vide P.P.S.). I trust and suppose the printers need not take so much as a week from to-day (Wednesday morning, the 6th, when I get out of bed in the cold to write this at 6 a.m.) in getting the proof of the pamphlet[1] all ready. It would be a fresh kindness if you could look in at Great James Street, and send me (what should be lying about there on the table) the *third* volume of Victor Hugo's *Actes et Paroles—Depuis l'Exil;* also, if you can find them (these probably in the bedroom), two fat little volumes in white paper, the *Opere di Giacomo Leopardi* in verse and prose. There is also

[1] *Note on the Muscovite Crusade.*

another edition there, taller and slimmer, in a pinkish instead of white paper cover, which would serve my turn—but I should prefer the former if discoverable.

"P.P.S.—10½ a.m. Your note (for which many thanks) has just arrived in time before I close this. Can you give me any fuller or more distinct reason against the dedication to Karl Blind? If so, it will be yet another friendly act on your part; if not, a generous gentleman like yourself will surely be the first to admit that I have such grave reason for profound gratitude towards him, that it must be a very much graver reason than his personal unpopularity with others—even if that were one likelier than it is to carry special weight with me—which should modify my own sense of obligation. I never heard anything said against him to counterweight so much as must be said in his favour. . . .

"P.P.P.S.—It was when Kossuth had fallen most out of favour with the crowd in this country, which once had wellnigh worshipped him, that Mr. Landor, with whom he had quarrelled for a too hastily generous attempt to serve him in the way of money—the Landor who, a few years later, ennobled me by the title of 'his dear friend'—laid 'at his gate' the noblest words of dedication known in our language, or in any. It is, or it should be, I think, an inherited or traditional habit and example among us Republicans."

In another letter of the same date, and on the same political question, Swinburne says:

"My dear Watts,

"Even before I got your note of yesterday, and wellnigh as soon as my last 'budget' was fairly despatched to your long-suffering hands, I had determined *against* my proposed dedication on the single ground that, whatever feeling of personal loyalty and gratitude towards Blind I might (as I do, and always must and ought to) entertain, it would hardly seem consonant with my loyalty as a Frenchman (partly by blood and wholly in heart and sympathy and inherited duty) to inscribe my declaration of political faith in this matter to a man who, greatly to my regret, had publicly approved the violation, by Bismarck and his master, of Alsace and Lorraine. This and the thought of how such a dedication might not unjustly appear in the eyes of fellow-Republicans in France, to whom I should naturally be sending the pamphlet, decided me not to take (at all events) this occasion of expressing my private regard and my thorough public sympathy with his anti-Slavonic opinions—and Kossuth's. The reason alone given, necessarily counterweighs any impulse to take the unpopular side on behalf of a man who had obliged me, and any remembrance of such a perfectly inapposite example as that which I cited of Landor's glorious and more than chivalric and Homeric generosity of spirit shown towards the statesman last named—an instance which I am curious to know whether you had ever heard of before—that thrice unhappy 'faggot of dry sticks' having been so rapidly and rigidly seized and cast (so to speak) upon the fire by the hands of legal injustice and imbecility. Do you remember, or may I venture to quote to you,

a couplet which was often in my mind last summer, translated by Landor from his own Latin, on English courts of law?

> "'Where all but innocence trust,
> And all find justice but the just.'

"Although I do not remember whether in all our many talks on English humorists we ever discussed Fielding together, yet I am confident enough of your fellow-feeling with me on the scale of that great man, too, as well as all others but one (you know what is in my eyes, as it would have been in Landor's and would be in Jowett's, your one great instance of critical heresy or deficiency), to tell you my reply to an application from Jones (E. B.) enclosing a circular of the philo-Bulgarian conference to be held in St. James's Hall—viz., that this outbreak of English sympathy with suffering Bulgars, especially in quarters where I had never been able to find or awaken a spark on behalf of Italy, Hungary, or Poland, reminded me irresistibly of the query addressed so persistently to her lord by the chaste Mrs. Jonathan Wild, *née* Letitia Snap.

"I would give anything, by-the-by, for the hand of a great caricaturist at this moment, that I might draw that gallant Crusader, the loyal Knight, Sir John de Bright (whose very name makes me 'drop into poetry,' as you see, unawares), in the broad-brimmed basnet of his Plantagenet forefathers, laying his good lance in rest (with 'Ha! Beauséant! St. John for Birmingham and our Blessed Lady of Cotton!') in defence of the Holy Sepulchre against the miscreant worshippers of false Mahound. Do you know no comic artist to whom you could

suggest the subject and the knightly motto or war-cry (of which I make him a free present) for epigraph? Well, thank Somebody (as Clough says), no one ever could, or can, call me a Radical (in the English sense of the word).

"Yours ever,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

"HOLMWOOD,
"*December* 12, 1876.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"I trust I need not once more assure you that I am not conventionally, but sincerely, grateful to you for every fresh instance of friendly and considerate forethought on your part; but I am really not less than amazed at the suggestion that I of any man on earth could be accused of libel. This is neither matter of rhetoric nor (were that possible to me on this subject) of jest or irony: it is matter of evidence from newspapers and Blue-books. No word of mine on the matter is a quarter, a tenth part, as strong as what was most justly said at the time (in the House of Commons and elsewhere) by Mill and many others; but pray take especial notice of this point, for I think it material to my case—after I had written what I did in the best of composition, remembering how much time had elapsed, and thinking it possible, though not probable, that my memory might unconsciously have exaggerated the horrors, I looked up an article by Dr. Sandwith (of Kars) in the *Fortnightly Review* for July 1, 1871, pp. 38 and 39 especially, to which, if you can possibly find time, I would beg you to refer, as I did before I would send off my MS.

Assuredly I never imagined (nor, I hope, is it necessary to add that such an idea would in no wise have emboldened me, as your words would almost seem to suggest, to venture on charges or allusions from which I should otherwise have shrunk—an imputation so grievously dishonourable that I cannot imagine you to have perceived that it was naturally implied by the wording of your explanation as to the legal status of Mr. Eyre)—I never imagined that that person's former position in the public service, which he disgraced for ever in the sight of history and the world, or the publicity of his trial afterwards, would or could or ought to disable him from bringing an action against Mr. Mill (were he happily alive), Dr. Sandwith, or myself; or when Landor publicly (in a letter to the *Examiner*) denounced and impeached an uncle (by marriage) of my own as a 'torturer and murderer' (*totidem verbis*) of the people he was sworn and enthroned as Governor to protect—and that on charges, however grave, light as a feather when set against the avowed and vaunted atrocities of Eyre and his gang—no counter-charge of libel was ever (as far as I know) talked or thought of. I do trust, I must say, that in my case you have at least not struck out of my text the reference to 'English Bashi-Bazouks under the eye of an English Pasha,' without which my whole rejoinder to Carlyle is simply nullified or stultified; but I must confess I shall be very uneasy and uncomfortable till I do know exactly to a letter what changes or cancels have been made. I did not follow Dr. Sandwith in quoting the loathsome detail about the 'whips made of piano-wire' being first tried on

the backs of women, and showing 'that their skins were easier cut (*sic*) than those of males,' for very shame and physical nausea; but now I could almost wish I had.

"I was much surprised and vexed to see in the *Examiner* a statement about my proposed dedication to Blind, which may be the means of causing me very great annoyance now that the idea is given up.

"I was much more surprised than gratified to see D. G. R.'s name among the philo-Bulgars at St. James's Hall. Was there no mistake?

"Yours ever,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

"P.S.—May I ask you, when you next see him, (1) to desire Chatto to let me have back the MS. of my pamphlet, which his printers omitted to send;[1] (2) to find out for me how it is that, among announcements of articles forthcoming in the January number of *Belgravia*, no mention is vouchsafed, or apparently thought worth making, of the poem which, at the cost of very considerable inconvenience to myself and interruption to my immediate work, I devoted a whole day's drudgery to correcting (in a very faulty proof), and returned at once, as requested, by the very next post, that no time might be lost or inconvenience caused (except to myself!)? I sincerely hope it cannot have miscarried. I added a request, by the way, that it should be as soon as possible returned to me with the revised proof for the purpose of collation—very

[1] *Note on the Muscovite Crusade.*

necessary, indeed, as you would assuredly say if you had seen the first proof.

"Ever yours,
"A. C. SWINBURNE."

In the next letter he still dwells on the subject of his *Note on the Muscovite Crusade.*

"*December* 14, 1876.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"Many thanks for both your notes just received. You will not doubt that I am sincerely sensible of your friendship and consideration, shown now as ever. As Chatto and Windus have not yet thought proper to return the manuscript, I cannot yet collate it with the printed text; but I only see eight words altogether struck out: 'under the eye of an English Pasha,' p. 8, and the word 'satrap' in the preceding sentence ('satellites of the former satrap'), a term I had already applied to Eyre, unchallenged, as well as that of 'Pasha'; and as whatever was done certainly was done 'under his eye,' I don't understand wherein lay the objection. *Per contra*, on the next page two little words ('of a') are inserted which make me appear to allude again by a very superfluous kind of reversion to Eyre. I described Frederick William with historical accuracy as 'a drunken murderer and whipper of women,' alluding, of course, to the utterance recorded in the *Life of Frederick the Great*, of the scourging of an honest girl by the old King's orders because the young Prince had once paid her a compliment, in passing, on her beauty (vol. ii. of 1st ed.), and the context made it plain

enough (quoting, as I did, the very text of the 'Life five times as carefully marked in three sentences), that it could be to nobody but the Prussian tyrant that I was referring; and I hardly suppose *his* representatives would be able, if inclined, to bring an action for libel against history in vindication of their old pig progenitor's subporcine character! I cannot but wish these two words out again (if this be now possible), as they spoil the sentence and distort the meaning—making it, indeed, appear to renew an old attack and convey a fresh imputation equally and utterly out of place, and out of my mind on purpose. Is there any *third* excision? I have not observed any; and hope there is not such another singularly unlucky interpolation anywhere as this, which (as you do not refer to any), I suppose, was the printer's 'happy thought.' Jowett, on the other hand, who has this minute driven off from the door, after making himself, as usual, very delightful as a visitor, and inviting my assistance for a good part of the morning in the compilation of a select hymn-book (not a 'Child's Bible' this time), objects earnestly and indeed regretfully to the tone and terms of undeserved respect with which I have spoken of Carlyle. So once more I find how difficult it is to please all one's friends—if any. . . .

"Ever yours gratefully,

"A. C. SWINBURNE.

"Let me know what you think of Arnold's *New Sirens*. I am anxious to know, and hopeful of your sympathy (as usual in matters poetic). I *am* to meet him next month at our common college.

"These d—— printers have restored or retained a

blunder which I had *most carefully* corrected, and which *stultifies* a most important sentence; p. 14, ninth line, for 'all great men whose genius,' etc., these Bulgars (O God, that I were a Pasha for their cursed sake!) have stuck in that d—— word 'of'—'of whose genius'—and made utter nonsense of the whole passage. For pity's sake, *if possible, make* them correct this before copies are sold!"

Then there came from Swinburne a few days later a long letter particularly devoted to an expression of his opinions on the much debated subject of Governor Eyre and negro rebellion in Jamaica—a subject with which his mind was so intensely occupied at the moment.

"HOLMWOOD,
"*December* 19, 1876.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"Though I know you are so busy a man that you cannot have much time for the reading or writing of merely friendly letters, with no special point or aim to them, yet I do not like to be always writing to one of the best friends I ever had—or anyone else ever had, for that matter—on business only—*i.e.* (for this is what it really comes to), only whenever I have a fresh favour to ask of his kindness, a fresh burden to lay on his friendship (be the weight of it great or small), and fresh obligation and debt of gratitude to take upon myself. So to relieve myself, at the risk of boring you (another instance, this too, of one-sided friendship which thinks to pay its debts of gratitude—only, Heaven knows, I do not think to do that, now or

ever, I might say—by borrowing anew of your patience and your time), I am minded to-night to write you a word (egoistic, of course, but not business-like) on a matter which has lately been often in my mind since I undertook to write on—I hardly yet like to say attack—the grand Old Enemy whom I have admired all my life as heartily even as he hates and scorns the principles and the men I most love and honour.

"I want to tell you—in case you care to know—that I, who have always at least honestly tried to think as well as to speak of all other men with perfect honesty, unbiassed by personal favour or disfavour on private grounds, must confess, as I do without shame or regret, to a bitter personal grudge against Mr. Eyre. He has quite unconsciously done me, and I should think many another man of my age and temper, one of the least forgettable or forgivable of all wrongs. He has thrown down into the dirt, broken to pieces, smashed and defiled past all chance of cleaning or of mending, the living image of one of my favourite heroes, a figure which I really used to cherish and dwell upon in my mind with quite a boyish loyalty and reverence—his own.

"Ever since I had first read poor Henry Kingsley's noble narrative of Eyre's yet nobler doings and sufferings in his unparalleled Australian adventure—a story to which the mightiest episode of the *Odyssey* is tame and unheroic—the hero's name had been set apart and treasured in my thoughts only beneath those very highest names of all which meant martyrdom as well as heroism, and a great cause as well as a great action or a great endurance. As if I had been a boy again, I felt as though I

could have walked barefoot from hence to London for one look into his face, having never done anything in my poor life that might make me worthy to touch the heroic hand of such a man as that. And now I would 'take the wings of the morning and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea' to avoid its contact—alas! I cannot write of it now without feeling bitterly an aftergust or afterglow of that enthusiasm and passion of deliberate loyalty, which I do think is so good a thing, a feeling so precious as well as so exquisite and wholesome and profound in the pleasure it gives one, that I could sooner forgive a woman—I think, at least, I could—who had won and then shown herself unworthy of my love than a man who had won and shown himself unworthy of my loyalty. For, of course, the sweeter and more gracious (to yourself, at least, even if of little or no worth to others) a thing is that you have to give or that you seem to have received, the worse and the more bitter it is to find that you have received nothing but a mockery, and given your whole loyal heart and soul of worship at an altar where the god was no god at all, but a cracked and splintered and rotten idol defiled with blood. If ever I forgive that ——!

"I have picked up lately out of Russell Smith's catalogues some very curious books which I must show you some day, among them a pseudonymous libel by the Buchanan of the period on 'the three confederates'—Pope, Gay, and Arbuthnot—with a caricature frontispiece which his emulous modern rival failed to imitate, though the doggerel is as worthy of New as of Old Grub Street. It was much appreciated by Jowett, who takes especial

interest in all concerning the famous men of that time.

"Ever yours,
"A. C. SWINBURNE."

Again, with Bulgarian matters still exercising him seriously, he writes:

"*December* 24, 1876.

"Karl Blind has written me another most friendly and kindly letter, which I can lend you if you like; it contains matter of historic interest (by-the-by, I should like to have his first back at your convenience) in which he notes with due sense and scorn of its absurdity, saying for one thing that the 16,000,000 Turks in Europe and Asia work just as the Bulgarians—I hope not, I must say, though I certainly have heard scandalous rumours to that effect—'being peasants and handicraftsmen,' though I cannot see why that should either imply or excuse a propensity in the Bulgarian direction."

And still again:

"*December* 27, 1876.

"I have seen the weekly papers you mention, and much enjoyed the 'garlicky rant' of the *Spectator*. 'That's good; garlicky rant is good.' Had every phrase of the Bulgarian dialect been ransacked in research of one most perfectly definite of that particular Bulgar's distinctive quality who edits the journal in question, none could have been found, I think, quite so exquisitely fit and felicitous as this. 'A fact,' as Miss Edgeworth's books for children always add in a note to any noteworthy incident; I have read the printed

indictment of my grandfather's friend brought on that special charge by the author of *Justine*. It is evidently an hereditary (or as that implies sonship, and sonship implies fatherhood, and fatherhood, I should humbly presume, implies procreation, it may perhaps be more accurate to say a traditional) habit or dodge or principle of tactics among the inextirpable succession of literary Bulgars to assail strangers on the groundless charge of intrusion on their own reserved ground. . . .

"I enclose Blind's second letter, which I must answer by this post; please return it with the other. I am sure you would like and respect that man if you knew him, as I do most heartily, as far as my knowledge of him goes. As for talk against any man of the vague unfriendly sort, when I was sixteen years old I read (in the Rev. J. Mitford's Pickering-Aldine ed. of Milton's works, 1851, v. 1, pp. cci, ccii) what Saumaise said once in the ears of listening Europe concerning John Milton. Then and there, boy as I was, I learnt the worth of the good or evil report of strangers; and I hope and believe I may honestly and unreservedly say I have always invariably kept and consistently acted on my resolution never to let my own quiet and self-respect and peace of mind, or my opinion of another man, be in any way affected or disturbed by so vile a thing as the foul breath of babble, whether deliberately malignant and purposely mendacious, or (which is a far more perilous and poisonous form of scandal than the first) the mere loose-tongued and vacuous chuckling chatter proverbially the special appanage of old maids. I must say I have met with it oftener among men than women, and

men who (like Don Juan at the Russian Court) 'were not old—nor even maids.'

"I need not (but for all that I will) say what genuine and warm pleasure you have given me by the last good words of your letter. If you like me one-half as well as I like you, I am well content—and well may be. Witness my hand (which would fain not be too far off to shake yours in sign of all good wishes for this and all seasons),

"ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE."

VI

SWINBURNE'S LETTERS TO WATTS-DUNTON

(1877-1878)

His eagerness to serve a friend—Criticism of *Harold* (Tennyson)—Friendship with Professor Nichol—Thomas Purnell ("Q" of *Athenæum*)—*Love's Cross Currents* (*Tatler*)—Many requests for advice from Watts-Dunton on his work—Expressions of friendship for Watts-Dunton (an interesting example of Swinburne's endless commissions entrusted to his "friend of friends"), etc.

THE following letter shows Swinburne's eagerness to serve an old college chum:

"HOLMWOOD,
"*January 3*, 1877.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"I believe I am not betraying a friend's confidence in sending you the enclosed notes by Nichol, which Appleton has declined to publish in the *Academy*. Nichol is naturally anxious to get them published as a matter of mere justice to his professional as well as personal reputation; and I believe I need not tell you that no personal kindness could confer a greater obligation on myself than a good turn done to the oldest friend I have. A mere glance over the columns will show the right, if not the necessity, he has to demand the only means of vindicating the results of his long and heavy labour from the most injurious of almost all

possible aspersions. If compatible (as, to judge from many parallel instances, I should suppose it must be) with habitual literary etiquette, he would be glad that his vindication should appear in the *Athenæum* (or, he says, the *Examiner;* but I have strongly dissuaded him from seeking help or shelter in that quarter, though all the doors stood open). So instead of applying to MacColl direct, I have, as usual, recourse to your untiring kindness, feeling that your greater intimacy must probably, and justly, carry greater weight with him than any request or recommendation of mine. I shall be greatly disappointed should you be unable to do me this small service to Nichol.

"If, as I earnestly hope may not be the case, you cannot (for once) do me this favour, may I ask you to return the notes direct to Professor Nichol, 2, The College, Glasgow?—as, indeed, he asked me merely to do, with a word of advice as to means and place of publication; but if I can secure him a speaking-ground in the *Athenæum*, he will doubtless forgive my delay and officiousness.

"With all truest good wishes for this and all years,

"Ever yours,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

So anxious was Swinburne to aid his friend that, when writing on the following day on various affairs of his own, he adds in a postscript:

"*January* 4, 1877.

"I hope you and MacColl will find yourselves able to help Nichol (and consequently serve me)

in the matter on which I wrote to you a day since, enclosing his notes."

In the same postscript he says:

"I send (for the *Athenæum*, if they like) a roundel, written on New Year's Day for the part of Mary Beaton (in the third play of my trilogy).

"Ever yours,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

ROUNDEL.

"For a light love's sake if a man be stricken,
Stricken in sleep till he wail and wake,
What herb shall heal or what hope shall quicken
The heart that sinks and the eyes that sicken
With dreams that darken and fears that thicken,
With days that hunger and nights that ache
For a light love's sake?
For a long love's love, for a sweet love's sadness,
For a sad love's sweetness, a bright love's break,
For a bad love's good that is best of badness,
For a mad love's wisdom, a wise love's madness,
For a live love's moan or a dead love's gladness,
Shall a man make merry though all men make
For a light love's sake?"

This roundel appeared in the *Athenæum*, 1877. It was originally intended by Swinburne for the part of Mary Beaton in his trilogy of *Mary Stuart* (1881).

A week later he again writes to Watts-Dunton regarding Nichol:

"I have just received the accompanying revision of his original notes from Nichol which he wants you to see. He tells me he is 'anxious for an introduction to the *Athenæum*, which, he says, has never been hostile to me, but *stiff*'—*e.g.*, revising my year's work on Dobell without a word of

acknowledgment. I presume the desire could easily be accomplished, and I need not (to you of all men) reiterate once more the assurance how anxious in my turn I must always be to do, or help in doing, any little service to my oldest friend.

"You asked for my final opinion on *Harold:* here it is. There was a very pretty song in *Queen Mary.* 'The rest is silence.'

"I had wellnigh forgotten the most indispensable point—to beg you (if you will be good enough) to return Nichol's papers herewith forwarded (after they have been seen in the proper quarter), not to me, but to Professor Nichol, 2, The College, Glasgow.

"Ever yours,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

Professor Nichol was a frequent visitor to The Pines in the eighties, where he was welcomed by Swinburne and Watts-Dunton. During later years he would come from Glasgow, sometimes making a lengthy visit during vacation time at the University. He proved rather a trying visitor to Swinburne in his last years. On one of these occasions he brought an enormous roll of manuscript, and insisted upon reading to Swinburne long extracts from some work he was writing, much to Swinburne's disgust. It was a case of the biter bit—and on this occasion Nichol got in the first bite.

"I won't see Nichol again," said Swinburne in a fit of exasperation after his departure. "He spent the time reading his own stuff to me!"

One is reminded of Carlyle's impatient comment upon Coleridge's love of talking.

This early college friend of Swinburne's was an arresting literary figure at that time. Born at Montrose in 1833, and educated at Balliol College, Oxford, where he and Swinburne first met, he was appointed Emeritus Professor of English Literature at Glasgow in 1861, and was well known as the author of *Lord Bacon's Life and Philosophy* for Black's series of "Philosophical Writers," and of the monograph on *Byron* and of *Carlyle* in "English Men of Letters." Swinburne wrote a critique on his classical drama, *Hannibal*, in the *Fortnightly* for December, 1872, and his volume of poems, *The Death of Themistocles*, etc., was reviewed by Watts-Dunton in the *Athenæum* (vol. viii., 1881). The work by which he will best be remembered is his *Tables of European History, Literature, Science, and Art, from A.D.* 200 *to* 1888, *and of American Literature, History, and Art.* This work, which has passed through various editions, and is printed in five colours, compresses with wonderful clearness the great leading facts of European history for nearly 1,700 years into a single slim volume, which has been described as a triumph of systematization.

At this date Swinburne wrote, mentioning his manuscript novel, *A Year's Letters* (afterwards known in book form as *Love's Cross Currents*), the very existence of which, strange to say, Watts-Dunton had, until now, never heard. It exhibits once more his genuine desire to assist another old friend, Thomas Purnell.

"HOLMWOOD,
"*February* 14, 1877.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"I pause in the midst of a paper for the *Athenæum* on the Poetry of Babies, in which I need not say I have at last made an opportunity (and made the most of it) to say my say in praise and glory of Christina Rossetti on that special score, as the spiritual sister of Blake himself.

"Your numerous graver engagements (from which you are so constantly good enough to snatch time to help a friend with good offices or good counsel) may probably and naturally have made you forget or overlook the not very important fact that rather more than a month ago (if I am not wrong) I consulted you *in re* Purnell, and his request for the use of an old manuscript of mine long laid aside (you have never seen nor, I presume, heard of it) which had failed, as the anonymous work of an unknown writer, to find favour in the sight of any publisher. (I need not say that this, as well as what follows, is in strict confidence, 'betwigst you and me,' as Mrs. Gamp says, and 'without prejudice'—in the professional phrase of Mr. Guppy.) *Cela s'entend.* Not hearing from you on the matter *pro* or *con*, and having pretty well forgotten all but the outlines of character and general tone of my maiden attempt (in 1862-63) at a study of contemporary life and manners, I hunted up the manuscript and sent it unrevised and even unreperused to my oldest (and, with yourself, my best and most trusted) friend, John Nichol, for his opinion and advice on the matter. (I must premise that, as a youngster, I and others always, and

justly, held in some awe as well as respect his ultra-Scottish quality of strict critical judgment, as noticeably clear-sighted and cool-headed even for a man some six years my senior.) It is with no mendacious mock-modesty—that vicious virtue of the moral British coward to which you know that I make no pretension ('I cannot attain unto it,' as the Psalmist regretfully remarks)—that I say I was really startled by the warmth and thoroughness of his repeatedly expressed admiration, and the vigour with which he insists that 'it *must* be published'; I send you but one sentence of his second or third letter on the subject by way of sample, asking you only to bear in mind the age, character, and position of the writer.

"'I hesitate to express my full feeling about the book,[1] lest the simple language should seem inflated. To me it appears an almost consummate piece of art, among English analytical novels of our age only rivalled by *The Scarlet Letter*. The surface is a sparkling picture of a phase of society with which the writer is evidently familiar. But how many will detect the darts of satire in every page, and the lurid scorn that runs through the whole?' (I didn't mean it for a satire, but I suppose the reader *would* hardly infer on the writer's part as warm and conscientious a regard for the British institutions of marriage, divorce, and inheritance as ever animated the chaste pen, for example, of the judicious Thackeray.)

"There is much more to the same, or an equally gratifying effect, and dealing with details of character unintelligible except after a reading of the

[1] *A Year's Letters.*

little story, which is from half to two-thirds of the usual novel's length—perhaps less. I have cancelled a few unimportant lines and passages—not half a page in all—to which Nichol seems to have thought that possible objection might be taken by Her Grace the Dowager Duchess of Grundy. So much for the book.

"Now, as to the place and manner of publication, I need hardly say that I expect no special advantage to myself from an anonymous or pseudonymous contribution to poor old Purnell's projected paper.[1] I have told him, indeed, that I can have nothing to do with a paper which should have anything in common with the *Hornets* and *Tomahawks*[2] of the period; also how glad I was, when a libel on Jowett appeared in *Vanity Fair*, that I had turned a persistently deaf ear to its editor's solicitations for my patronage, to which he has replied in an excellent spirit. On the other hand, there is this to be considered—and you, for one, will not doubt my word when I tell you it is a point which carries much more weight with me than any personal consideration of my own public repute or private interest—that I hold myself, as I have repeatedly said, under an obligation to Purnell which nothing can in any way cancel or in any adequate degree requite. It was directly through his friendly offices, and wholly through his unsolicited kindness, that I obtained what I then held, and still hold, as the very highest honour, privilege, and happiness of my

[1] The "projected paper" was a journal called the *Tatler*, and Purnell was the dramatic critic already referred to as Thomas Purnell, who wrote over the initial "Q" for the *Athenæum*.

[2] Names of popular London periodicals at that time in circulation.

whole life—that of being presented to the man who was to me (I should think) what Christ Himself must have seemed to His very first disciples, to whom and for whom I would very gladly have given all the blood of my body and all the powers of my heart and mind and soul and spirit—as gladly and thankfully as if I had still been in the first fever of a boy's loving worship and passionate reverence.

"Here, after many years, is the first opportunity given me of paying some little instalment of my great and lifelong debt to the man who was the immediate means of my being presented to Joseph Mazzini. Now let me ask you whether you really think it is possible for me to rise to the occasion after the following fashion—and you will allow that, unless I comply with this very first request for an act of good will or gratitude (though, of course, he does not put it in that light) on my part, I can only answer to such practical effect as this:

"'It is perfectly true, my dear fellow, that for ten years I have always admitted that I owe you an obligation which I never can duly repay, but wish I could repay, however inadequately, in some part. But this, you must observe, was simply a lie. I have the misfortune to be an habitual liar—especially on matters which affect a man's loyalty, his gratitude, or his honour. You now offer me the best and simplest opportunity of proving to you and to myself whether I meant what I said. I hasten to embrace the opportunity of showing that I did not. I have no reason to believe that by complying with your request I should gain anything for myself in the way of credit or of profit. I feel

it not wholly impossible that some people might think I should expose myself to some danger of loss on either score (in the eyes of some other people unknown). I cannot even in idea bring myself to face for one instant the possibility of such a risk; for I have the further misfortune to be a coward by nature, tradition, constitution, and descent. I regret, therefore, to say in effect—for security, self-interest, profit, and the good opinion of strangers are to me as the very breath of my nostrils—that I will see you d—— before I act up to my word, or show you the slightest practical token of that gratitude which I must allow, and you will allow, I have never been slow to express by word of mouth as long as I felt it perfectly safe to do so. And even now I am prepared to assert, and will stand by what I say like a man, that I shall be happy to prove my sense of obligation to you in any other way than the only one now apparent. Provided always, I need hardly add, that it costs me nothing, and is on all other grounds generally likely to conduce to my own credit and profit.'

"Upon my honour, and I write in cool blood and sober morning seriousness. . . . If ever I do degrade myself so far beneath the level of a very Bulgar, may I die—a Poet Laureate!

"After this fearful imprecation I had perhaps better subside, in dread of an anti-climax, and turn back to my babies, of whom I really think I shall make a very pretty prose poem for MacColl. (By the way, I ask you to give him, if he likes to insert it, and, if not, to return to me, the unique copy, now in your hands, of my *Ballad* to François Villon, which I want to see at once—and at last in

print.) As it is, I begin to see—it dawns upon me dimly—that with a generous disregard for the value of your time and a friendly contempt for the not wholly improbable chance that you may have something better to do than to decipher my rhapsodies, I have been writing to you *à propos de bottes* rather in the spirit and style of Master Herbert Seyton, if you do him the honour to remember anything of the name or nature of that young gentleman. My only apology must lie first of all in the only reason or excuse that I have for bestowing all my tediousness on your worship—namely, my trust in your said worship's kindness and friendly sympathy—on general, if not particular, grounds of fellow-feeling; and, secondly, in the sad fact that as in some points (one of which, I fear, you will infer to be exuberance of gushing chatter on all subjects of personal and egoistic excitement that may spring up to right or left—but I don't think I do often *gush* over you to this extent; I hope not, or you probably would drop my acquaintance), I found myself at thirty very much what I was at thirteen, so I have some reason to fear that if I live so long I shall find myself on the same points (like Landor) very much the same at seventy as I was at seventeen,[1] but also some reason to expect and believe that in any case and at any age I shall be,

"Ever yours,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

In reply to this letter Watts-Dunton earnestly protested against the publication of this novel in

[1] When Swinburne reached the age of seventy he was certainly in many respects, still very like a boy of seventeen in temperament.

The Tatler (as the periodical was called), which, in his opinion, was not the class of journal a writer of Swinburne's signal position in the literary world would do wisely to contribute. Swinburne, however, in his generous resolve to do Thomas Purnell a service, in spite of Watts-Dunton's protest, gave his consent to the production of his story in this journal in serial form; and so it came about that *A Year's Letters* began to appear in *The Tatler* on August 25, 1877, and was completed on December 29 of the same year, Swinburne selecting "Mrs. Horace Manners" as a pseudonym.

No sooner had *A Year's Letters* completed its serial course in *The Tatler* than Watts-Dunton began to advocate its publication in book form, and with a persistency more eloquent than when opposing its issue in a journal of no importance at the time when his attention was first drawn to it. But Swinburne, who had unearthed this "old manuscript long laid aside"—a manuscript which "had failed, as the anonymous work of an unknown writer, to find favour in the sight of any publisher," to quote the author's own words—unearthed it purely to "oblige a friend" to whom he owed a deep debt of gratitude, felt no desire to reveal himself as the author, and give so comparatively slight a work a place among his more ambitious productions. It took Watts-Dunton, indeed, wellnigh a quarter of a century to overcome his friend's scruples; for it was not until 1905 that Swinburne consented reluctantly to "disinter this buried bantling of his literary youth," which was issued by Messrs. Chatto and Windus with the new

title, suggested by Watts-Dunton, of *Love's Cross Currents.*

In a postscript to this letter he asks Watts-Dunton to order for him "Balzac's Correspondence" — the well-known volume, *Correspondance de Honoré de Balzac* (1819-1850)—which had just been published (Paris, 1876). Swinburne then goes on to make other requests in the same postcript.

"Secondly," he says, "will you look at the enclosed, and if you think it necessary or worth while, reply for me (as this may possibly shut him up) to the Bulgarian writer (would I were a Pasha for his sake !) to whom, as you will perceive, I have already had to write word that I know and wish to know nothing of any d—— paper from his b—— hand? This wild intimation, couched in legal phraseology, may possibly have the requisite effect if you will interpose (in my name) a few (strictly legal, as well as theological) allusions to his eyes, limbs, and general impudence.

"And, thirdly, will you kindly ask MacColl if he could oblige me by sending two or three copies of the number (I quite forget its date) of the *Athenæum* containing my verses on a forsaken garden—'In a coign of the cliff,' etc.? After half a day's hunting I cannot lay my hand on them anywhere, and I want one or two copies to give away; and also, if procurable, of last year's *Birth Song* on W. M. R.'s baby."

Swinburne's poem, *The Forsaken Garden*, so much admired by readers of the *Athenæum*, had appeared in that journal on July 22, 1876.

The other poem to which he alludes—*The Birth Song*, published in the *Athenæum*, February 19, 1876 — refers to William Rossetti's daughter, Olivia Frances Madox Rossetti, born September 20, 1875.

In this same postscript, Swinburne adds, showing plainly with what ceaseless energy he worked in those days at the quiet home at Henley-on-Thames :

"I have *done* and despatched *Congreve* to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and am about to write a few lines of criticism on Hugo's divine little poem published on Sunday (the 5th) in the *République des Lettres*, which I shall send to MacColl. I only wish I could borrow Gabriel Rossetti's genius for five minutes (but *that* I have often wished—in vain) and translate the Master's verse worthily."

Swinburne's characteristically appreciative criticism of Victor Hugo's "divine little poem" fills about two columns of the *Athenæum* (February 24, 1877). The poem, published in the *République des Lettres* in November, 1876, was called *La Sieste de Jeanne*, and Swinburne almost surpasses himself in his rapture over its thirty-eight poetic lines. "If a jewel of such price," he declares, "was in effect thrown into that year's treasury (1876)—as unquestionably it has been—it would seem somewhat less than rational or gracious to take the less heed of it because it bears the image and superscription of no Greek demigod, but of an immortal who has not yet put off mortality, as surely he need not do to establish his claim to godhead by right of godlike glory and by proof of divine beneficence."

The letter that follows is a good example of the interest Swinburne took in current journalistic literature.

"HOLMWOOD,
"*February* 27, 1877.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"Do tell me if you know or can find out who is the author of *The Israelitish Question, and the Comment of the Canaan Journals thereon.* It is far away the wittiest thing ever published within my memory. Aristophanes might have roared applause of it. Now for the first time in our day one can feel exactly what the contemporaries of the great writers of political squibs—whose crackers have still some fire left in them—must have felt when they were first let off. Some of the parodies are superhuman proofs of plenary inspiration unimpregnable by any infidel sophist. How *is* it the thing has had no more echo than in the columns of the *Pall Mall?* I found it quite difficult, when ordering it, to explain what I wanted—yet it must have been two good months out. Are we so much slower and heavier-witted than our fathers were from Swift's day down to Canning's? Or *can* the rancour of the newspapers so impartially and incomparably well chaffed in it, have been powerful enough to snuff out all notice of a pamphlet which really, to my weak mind, seems to approach nearer the unattainable model of Voltaire than anyone could have conceived it possible for any mortal man's wit to do? . . . In any case, there is an Englishman alive—if this be a fair sample of his capacity—who may take rank at once with the very greatest political humorists of all time—in my

poor opinion. I had no idea there was such wit left in this stolid world. Among his burlesque articles, the *Standard* is good, the *Telegraph* is very good, *The Times* is very good indeed, but the *Spectator* is 'beyond all mortal praise.' I am sure, knowing your sense of humour, that if you have read it you will agree with me, and, if not, when you have, you will.

"My essay or study on Charlotte Brontë[1] is growing into another pamphlet, and I will say I think one of the best things in prose—but MacColl can give it by instalments.

"Please, however it fares with my long account at Nutt's, *do* secure for me, *on the day of publication*, a copy of the new series of Hugo's *Légende des Siècles*."

"HOLMWOOD,
"*February* 29, 1877.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"Our respective notes of yesterday will just have crossed, but I send a line again to acknowledge yours and to ask if you will be good enough to get me a book reviewed in yesterday's *Pall Mall*, and published in London by Hachette (King William Street, Strand)—*François Villon, étude biographique*, par Auguste Longnon, who, it would seem, has unearthed a whole lot of new documents relative to the respected and reputable life of the third great Christian poet of the Ages of Faith—in every way confirmatory (I am thankful to say) of all previous evidence as to its character. You might (if he should not happen

[1] *A Note on Charlotte Brontë* was reviewed by Watts-Dunton in the *Athenæum* (vol. ii., 1877).

to have seen or heard of it) let D. G. R. know of this, in case he retains any of the old affectionate interest which he formerly shared with me in the work and fortunes of the bard. . . . Pray do also fulfil your kindly offer (which has just crossed my petition to you) to get me Hugo's book without the delay of an unnecessary hour.[1] How well I remember the rapture of receiving the two volumes of the first part of it in the early autumn of 1859—over seventeen years ago—a good year before I had left college! One might almost make a poem*et* on that.

"Ever yours,
"A. C. SWINBURNE."

In announcing his father's death, Swinburne writes:

"HOLMWOOD,
"*March* 6, 1877.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"You are the second friend to whom I write word of my father's death on Sunday afternoon. The first was Jowett. I feel that I may be as sure of your sympathy as of his.

* * * * *

"It will be a great little kindness if you can get and send me *at once* last week's number (Sunday, February 25) of the *République des Lettres*, which must somehow have miscarried for the first time. This week's (March 4) has come all right. The missing one, I suppose (oddly enough, as it

[1] Victor Hugo's *Légende des Siècles* was reviewed by Watts-Dunton in the *Athenæum* (vol. i., 1877).

seems) must have contained the remainder of the article on me begun the week before.

"I am reading with very genuine though not unalloyed interest and sympathy, as well as admiration, the *Autobiography of Miss Martineau*, always such a brave woman, often so wise—sometimes not *so* (as her Yankee friends might have said). My warm admiration and enjoyment of two among her stories for children, and one of those for adults, go back (in one, if not two, of the cases) almost as far as my memory of books.

"Always, my dear Watts, in good times for me as now in bad,

"Affectionately and gratefully yours,

"A. C. SWINBURNE.

"P.S.—I am sorry to hear from MacColl that he has been 'laid up with an accident.' I hope he is all right now. Will you let him know I am going on with the essay on Charlotte Brontë, which he can have (all or part of it) as soon or as late as he pleases?"

A week later Swinburne writes:

"*March* 24, 1877.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"I need not say it could never have entered my mind to impute the brief delay of your answer to my two long (if not—to indulge in a Lamb-like play on words—my too long) epistles to any cause but the necessity of accident. This premised once for all, I may say with a clear conscience how glad I was to get your note yesterday. You must certainly find time and make occasion by-and-by

to run down here and review the treasures of the library and prints-room before, at some dim future date yet unfixed, they are once more taken down and boxed up for removal. My mother will be glad to see you by-and-by, and I to show you what I never shall have such pleasure again in showing as in the days when I never thought of their passing into my hands, for God knows the sense of ownership and inheritance has taken all taste out of my mouth for any of them at present.

"My Villon project is to incorporate all my yet unpublished translations—new and old—into the body of an essay on his genius and position in literary history.[1]

"I think it probable that henceforth (if my health permit, and I must endeavour to take care that it shall) I shall live rather more than less in London than I have done of late years. My mother says she wants me always to consider her house my home—and so in a sense I naturally shall, wherever and whenever she may fix it; but of course I shall not regularly live with her, as my sisters and brother will continue to do. It is pleasant to think that one or two—especially pleasant, I will frankly say, to think that you yourself—would miss me or feel any want if I were to be cut off from the society of my friends in London. . . .

"I have just done upwards of forty lines on a marine or patriotic and poetic-historical subject

[1] Swinburne's *Translation from the French of François Villon* was published in the following year (1878) in *Poems and Ballads* (Second Series).

which are certainly as fine as anything I ever did or hope to do. If I am wrong you shall tell me so when you hear or read them.

"Ever yours,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

Again he turns to his friend for assistance in regard to matters that might well have been settled without his assistance. But, fully occupied as Watts-Dunton was with his own affairs at this important literary period in his life, he never hesitated to attend to these hundred and one commissions.

"HOLMWOOD,

"*January* 20, 1878.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"I was in hopes to have seen you yesterday by or before one o'clock, as I thought we had agreed, but I suppose you found it impossible to keep the engagement. I stayed in some time over the hour, and consequently, when I did go out, I found Chatto's shop shut—whereat, like the heroine of Gabriel Rossetti's poem, *The Bride's Chamber*, I 'cursed God, and lived.'

"A matter on which I wished to ask for your advice is about my four sonnets on the war (*i.e.*, *The White Czar*, (2) *Rizpah*, and that *To Kossuth*, which I enclose). . . . Now I am, of course, really and seriously anxious that this quartette or quadrilateral of poems should appear at once and strike while the iron is hot. To delay their appearance would be like postponing a speech till the session was over. Out they must and shall come, if I

have to pay for having them printed on a fly-sheet and hawked about the streets!

"By-the-by, I must say it was rather a daring assertion (*in hac re*) of our friend MacColl's that the *Athenæum* has always kept clear of political contributions in verse as well as prose, when in 1859—as I perfectly well remember—it published a whole series of red-hot political poems by Mrs. Browning, abusing England and glorifying Louis Buonaparte, for which I trust she has been forgiven.

"Before ending, I must consult you in a rather delicate point of etiquette. Some years ago I was unwise enough to lend Miss Blind my copies of Matthew Arnold's earliest publications, *The Strayed Reveller* and *Empedocles on Etna* (and, I think, also the first series of his collected poems—a copy given me by a near relation now dead—which I valued far beyond their money's worth as rarities, though that is now very considerable), as books I had had when a boy and carried about in my pocket on holidays, and which are now not to be had for love or money. I mentioned this matter once to her with all possible delicacy, and she 'was very sorry they had not been returned'—which was not very satisfactory. *Can* you suggest anything? But I fear the question will baffle even your resources. I would give anything in reason to have the books back. I have hardly any I should be so sorry to have lost. Except, indeed, the book so many years detained by Gabriel Rossetti, which I positively must and will have back, as I know that, at all events, cannot be mislaid—Hope's *Costumes of the Ancients* (one vol., folio, boards, first edition), which also was given me

(when I was a child) by one of my family long since dead, of whom I have no other memorial. If you can at the same time rout out the three or four numbers of the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, wanting to complete my set for binding, lent—not less wisely—in the same quarter, I shall be thankful. But 'God do so unto me, and more also'—whatever that Scriptural imprecation may mean—if ever again I lend anything more valuable than money to a woman or an artist.

"And now I think I may and must release you, only hoping I have not trespassed too far on your patience and friendship. Write to me at Glasgow, and I will not fail to answer.

"Ever yours,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

In this letter Swinburne enclosed the proof of the sonnet *To Louis Kossuth*, with his corrections for the press.

"Light of our fathers' eyes, and in our own
Star of the unsetting sunset! for thy name,
That on the front of noon was as a flame
In the great year nigh thirty years agone
When all the heavens of Europe shook and shone
With stormy wind and lightning, keeps it fame
And bears its witness all day through the same;
Not for past days and great deeds past alone,
Kossuth, we praise thee as our Landor praised,
But that now too we know thy voice upraised,
Thy voice, the trumpet of the truth of God,
Thine hand, the thunder-bearer's, raised to smite
As with heaven's lightning for a sword and rod
Men's heads abased before the Muscovite."

The following letter is an interesting example of these endless "commissions" with which he

entrusted his "friend of friends," who was becoming every day more and more indispensable:

"HOLMWOOD,
"*June* 22, 1879.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"I write in great haste to catch, if possible, the morning post; there is no other till to-morrow evening!

"Chatto has not sent a single weekly newspaper to order: they should *all* have been here by nine this morning. On second thoughts, to prevent any confusion of my own with my mother's account, I shall not order the *Pall Mall* of the people who supply her with journals, but order it straight from the office, subscribing for three or six months. Will you kindly draw up and forward me a proper business-like order to that effect, and let me know if, and how much, I ought to pay in advance, a task which you, perhaps, would undertake for me, and I could send you a cheque for the amount as soon as you can get and send me a cheque-book? I have not one blank cheque by me, which is very inconvenient.

"As to my MSS. and proofs, the unfinished article on the sham Shakespearian play of *King Edward III.* was assuredly left in the drawer of the table I mentioned, together with *Capel's Prolusions*, and in that book a small slip of paper containing notes for the said article. Till I have these by me I can make no way at all.

"I have just found my missing pen-holder, and can write at comparative ease again; so don't trouble yourself about that. I want and must have of Chatto *at once* proofs of 1st act of *Mary Stuart*,

part 3rd (the MS. I have); I hope you will not by this time think me as exacting as a certain friend of ours, seeing how important these things are to me.

"Did I tell you I had (before leaving town) a letter from some Hungarian Countess, whose name nobody can speak and nobody can spell, asking leave to translate something of mine? I cannot find the letter (a very curt one), which must be drifting loose about my rooms. I would not be ungracious to a woman (even a woman of letters), so if you can find it will you show me how to answer and direct it properly?

"*A propos*, you will think it 'vulgar' to express contempt and disgust for professional literary hacks; may I ask your opinion as to *both* parties in the late case concerning an alleged libel in *Truth*? These, and such as these, creatures are what I (and I think most people) understood by the term 'men of letters'; and if it be 'vulgar' (as you seem to think) to keep aloof from and look down on them, 'vulgar' I must be content to remain. Thackeray, indeed, could not pretend to despise them without justly incurring the reproach of vulgarity, for he had long been of their tribe; witness his *Yellowplush Papers* and *Miscellanies, passim*. With me, I would beg leave to submit, the case is somewhat different. . . .

"I cannot but be amused with dear old W. M. R.'s tribulation on finding the authorship of his 'libel' generally known, when I remember of old his frequent denunciations of the anonymous system, and his fiery expressions of scorn for any

man who would not prefer to sign anything he might write, whenever signature was possible.

"I trust you *will* gratify us all soon with another visit.

"Ever yours,

"A. C. SWINBURNE.

"(To be forwarded).

"Odd volumes of Hugo: *Légende des Siècles*, vol. i.; *Actes et Paroles*, vol. i.; *Avant l'Exil*, vol. ii.; *Pendant l'Exil.*

"Parcels of papers (proofs and MSS.) wrapped loosely (not tied or sealed) in brown paper or newspaper, containing MS. (unfinished) of *Tristram and Iseult.*

"In drawer of little writing-table, MS. notes *On the Historic Play of King Edward III.*, with *Capel's Prolusions* bound in calf extra.

"Chatto to send me every week the *Athenæum*, *Academy*, *Saturday Review*, and *Spectator.*"

The time was now rapidly approaching when these two friends were to become housemates at The Pines.

VII

SWINBURNE AT THE PINES

In the autumn of 1879 Swinburne, broken down in health, went to visit Watts-Dunton, then living in the Werter Road, Putney. "Stay here for a while," said his friend; "the air of Wimbledon Common will soon restore you."

Swinburne assented. Ever since the first meeting with Watts-Dunton he had been conscious of a tranquillizing influence in his friend's personality, which appealed to him at this critical juncture. Yet, wreck as he was, it is doubtful whether he would have listened to anyone else who had made a like proposal. In any case, no one else came forward, and Lady Jane Swinburne, deeply concerned at the stories she had heard of her son's ways of living, had written a distracted letter to Watts-Dunton invoking his help, as she knew already the importance Swinburne attached to his advice. His doctor had already given up the case as practically hopeless, and few would have cared for the responsibility that Watts-Dunton so cheerfully assumed.

On the day when Swinburne arrived, he could barely walk a dozen steps without the helping arm

of his friend; and when assisted to a chair, his body shook from head to foot as if with some convulsive seizure. Certainly he was in a desperate plight. By wise and tactful dietetic treatment he improved wonderfully, and a week later already he had found out what was destined to prove one of his favourite walks across Putney Heath.

And in the work of renovation Watts-Dunton's cook shares honour with her master. She was a mistress of her craft, and exerted all her cunning to concoct dainties for the sick poet. At first he ignored all her culinary blandishments. But she persisted, and finally he succumbed, and she took an hilarious delight as gradually the dainties disappeared more and more rapidly. "He's a-took it!" she would say, and carry round the empty plate in triumph to show the rest of the household.

Swinburne's health at the end of these few weeks' change was so markedly improved that he went to see his family. His mother was delighted at the change, and, hearing of Watts-Dunton's proposed move to The Pines, she wrote a letter of entreaty, asking him to take her son as lodger.

To this proposal Watts-Dunton did not at once consent. He felt it needed deliberation. Moreover, he wished to talk with other members of the family who were moving with him into his new quarters. But Swinburne himself now asked if he might come. He appreciated fully the change in his health, and he felt Watts-Dunton's companionship was something of which he felt increasing need.

There was always a yearning for congenial companionship in Swinburne's nature. Companionship

of some kind was an essential to his intellectual life. He had sought it years before under Rossetti's roof. But Rossetti, stimulating as a friend,[1] lacked that tranquillizing quality of friendship that Swinburne's nature peculiarly craved. Before long he left Chelsea, and became attached to a group of brilliant, erratic souls, who amused him, but soon played havoc with his highly-strung temperament.

Plastic and sensitive to a degree, Swinburne speedily took on the colour (for good or ill) of his immediate environment; and it was a happy day for him when a man like Watts-Dunton crossed his path, won his confidence, and appealed to the man's finer side; for Swinburne was never a vicious man —merely a highly impressionable man who fell into vicious ways more by way of imitation and bravado than because he really took pleasure in them. This is shown by the almost miraculous alacrity with which he shed the "old Adam" as soon as he had come to live with Watts-Dunton.

Some ten years before he joined Watts-Dunton in the autumn of 1879, Swinburne wrote to his friend in terms that showed clearly the part Watts-Dunton had begun to play in his life:

"I must say I do feel the want of a God (of faith and friendship) to whom I might offer sacrifices of thanksgiving for the gift of such a good friend as I have in you. I really know nothing else in my life for which I feel (and know that I ought to feel) so thankful as for this."

And after many years of intimacy he could still write as follows:

[1] He proved less satisfactory as a *companion*. See *ante*, p. 17.

"BROCKHAMPTON PARK,
"*July* 31 (2 p.m.), [1891.]

"MY DEAR WALTER,

"This is a terrible time for us. We had heard that my brother Edward had returned to England, and that he was lying dangerously, or at least seriously, ill in London. Woods, my mother's butler and trusted servant, was sent to look after him the day before yesterday. He has just telegraphed that my brother is dying. Alice has left us for London, not expecting to see him alive. She wished me not to accompany her (as of course I proposed to do), preferring to take only her maid with her. I had just finished the enclosed note when she came into this room with the news.

"Yours at all times affectionately,
"A. C. SWINBURNE.

"P.S.—To anyone but you, who know me better than anyone, it might seem necessary to explain that my inaction at such a moment is due to no fault or default of mine. It is wished that I should stay here, and under the circumstances I have, of course, no choice—even if I could wish to leave the house where my mother is.

"Please send me a line as soon as you get this. Not that I need any assurance of your sympathy, but that the sight of a written word from you would be the next best thing to the sight of your face or the touch of your hand."

So Swinburne went to The Pines.

"On October 9, 1879, 'one van of furniture, as per estimate and contract'—to adopt the carter's

Brockhampton Park
July 31 (2 P.M.)

My dear Walter

This is a terrible time for us. We had heard that my brother Edward had returned to England, & that he was lying dangerously or at least seriously ill in London. Woods, my mother's trusted butler & servant, was sent to look after him the day before yesterday. He has just telegraphed that my brother is dying. Alice has left us for London – not expecting to see him alive. She wished me not to accompany her (as of course I proposed to do), preferring to take only her maid with her. I had just finished the enclosed note when she came into this room with the news.

Yours at all times affectionately
A. Swinburne

T.O.

FACSIMILE LETTER: SWINBURNE TO WATTS-DUNTON.

P.S. To any one but you who know me better than any one it might seem necessary to explain that my inaction at such a moment is due to no fault or default of mine. It is wished that I should stay here - & under the circumstances I have of course no choice - even if I could wish to leave the house where my mother is.

Please send me a line as soon as you get this. Not that I need any assurance of your sympathy, but that the sight of a written word from you would be the next best thing to the sight of your face or the touch of your hand.

own phraseology on this memorable occasion—was removed from 25, Guilford Street, Russell Square, where Swinburne lodged, to The Pines, Putney Hill. This van contained Swinburne's worldly effects. They filled two rooms—one room on the first floor, looking out upon the back garden, and still known as 'Swinburne's library'; and a bedroom on the floor above, with a 'commanding view' of Putney Hill from the top window in front of the house."[1]

Gradually he recovered not only his physical strength, but his mental activity, and the idea (which has become so prevalent during the last year or so) that the Swinburne of The Pines was a kind of amiable eccentric with the ancient spirit and fire pretty nigh extinguished, is far removed from the truth. The fact that he had lost the taste for his old Bohemian life by no means implies that he had lost the zest for living, and only those unacquainted with his life at The Pines could suppose that he dragged out a monotonous, vegetating existence. He lived simply and quietly, it is true, realizing at last the harmfulness to one of his hyper-excitable temperament of those social distractions that prove just an agreeable stimulus to some men. A man's method of living must be judged in relation to his temperament. Browning's "white tie" proclivities were as essential to his intellectual well-being, as were Swinburne's stay-at-home habits to his. Yet Swinburne's life at The Pines, though quiet and sequestered, was anything but dull. His high

[1] Vide *Life and Letters of Theodore Watts-Dunton.* (T. C. and E. C. Jack, Ltd.)

spirits and irrepressible humour were obvious enough to intimate friends. His intellectual acuteness was maintained down to the very end. Extreme deafness, during the last year or so of his life, put restrictions on his intercourse with some friends. But with those of his immediate circle to whose voices he was accustomed, even this affliction made little difference to his liveliness and active interests. Nor can we concur with the view that sees such a lamentable falling off in the poetic work achieved at The Pines.

Some critics seem to have made up their minds that there was something necessarily devitalizing in the air of Putney, and necessarily paralyzing in the friendship with Watts-Dunton, and proceed then to read into Swinburne's work the effect of the blighting (?) influence. If his later work shows less of the old-time magic, is that not what we might expect from a middle-aged lyric poet? And if we miss the exultant splendour of the "first fine careless rapture," surely there is abundant beauty and vigorous mentality in the poetic output of his later years.

Both Miss Watts and Mrs. Mason (Watts-Dunton's sisters), who knew him for twenty-five years, have testified to the invariable courtesy and sweetness of Swinburne; and Mrs. Watts-Dunton has often spoken of his gaiety and charm.

Knowing his language, when excited, to be on a par with that of William Morris, Watts-Dunton stipulated that there should be no swear words used before the household. "If you are feeling that way," said his friend, "express yourself in

French." Swinburne agreed to this, and his knowledge of the language being, like his favourite Sam's knowledge of London, "both extensive and peculiar," he was able to relieve his feelings and spare those of the family.

One of his little boy friends, however, soon discovered that Swinburne in a temper meant Swinburne talking volubly in French, and sometimes, when Swinburne used a foreign term in ordinary conversation, he would say, "Oh, what a big swear word Mr. Swinburne's using!"

So far as his general habits were concerned, Swinburne's days at The Pines went round with almost clock-like regularity, and scarcely ever varied by a shade day in and day out. Like his old friend Rossetti, he worked into the night and was never an early riser. But, unlike Rossetti, he had a splendid capacity for sleep; even the afternoon naps in his bedroom, which usually lasted for two or three hours, never interfered with his night's rest.

If, however, for any cause he found himself sleepless, he would never lie in bed, but would get up instantly and proceed to his sitting-room to make notes for some piece of literary work.

His bedroom at The Pines was far from luxurious. The furniture, which was rather scant, belonged to the mid-Victorian period. It was, in fact, the same suite with which he had furnished his bedroom at Balliol in his undergraduate days. There were no pictures on the walls, except a portrait of his father, the Admiral, and one of his grandmother, Lady Ashburnham. A tall bookcase reaching from the floor to the ceiling was filled with books by English,

French, and Italian writers.[1] A particular shelf was devoted to sensational novels, these being especially drawn upon for bed reading.

During one of these "readings" on a certain night he nearly met with his death.

Swinburne was careless about fire to a degree that would seem almost incredible, unless one bears in mind that he was one of those men to whom danger is a thing unknown. When in his library he would occasionally set fire to a grate full of torn up manuscripts or letters, filling the house with smoke and alarming the household, while he remained tranquilly indifferent. And so frequently did he leave a blazing fire in his sitting-room that one of the household sat up in order to make all secure. But even after Swinburne had gone to his bedroom there was no absolute sense of security until the light beneath his door ceased to shine, for it was his habit to select a novel, and, propping himself up among his pillows, start reading with a candle, not on a table at his bedside, but on the counterpane at his very elbow. There was no need for this perilous jugglery with the candle, as a strong bedside table stood near at hand, where he also kept a few books, and this table had a rim round to prevent anything falling off. The light could have remained here with perfect comfort and security to the reader. But he would move it!

On one occasion, while nodding over a novel at the country house of a friend, his sheets caught fire, and but for the timely fact that the ignition roused him out of his doze, he must have been

[1] Lady Jane Swinburne began to teach her son Italian, probably French also, when he was four years old.

burnt to death. How he escaped with his life was always regarded as a marvel, for in the morning it was discovered that all the bedding on the candle side was a mass of charred fragments. The invitation to this country house was not repeated.

Swinburne took life tranquilly, though with abundant zest in his own way. He had always showed a business-like concern in arranging satisfactorily about his literary ventures, but he took little interest in what became of his money, and would leave money and securities lying about the house with a royal unconcern that worried everyone but himself. On one occasion, when the family property had depreciated very much in value, Lady Jane wrote to Watts-Dunton and asked him to call, as she wanted to see him particularly. She said it was of no use to send for Algernon.

When Watts-Dunton returned and told Swinburne of the business, he listened very patiently, then said: "Is that all?" Watts-Dunton remarked: "Yes, Algernon; but I suppose you understand what I say?" "Oh yes, I understand," said Swinburne; "but it is not worth while to discuss the subject further. We will now go on with our reading." It is unlikely that he ever gave the matter another thought.

Lady Jane was so delighted at the welcome change in her son's mode of life that she suggested to Watts-Dunton making a financial arrangement whereby Swinburne would come into money that otherwise would not accrue till after her death. Watts-Dunton was against this. He said that Swinburne was sufficiently well off, and that he thought the sacrifice she proposed, though ex-

tremely generous — she was one of the most generous of women—quite unnecessary.

Swinburne was a most entertaining companion to friends who might meet him at half-past one at the luncheon-table.[1] When visitors were present previously unknown to him, he was not a man to put a shy stranger at his ease. Indeed, being too deaf to take part in the table talk, he would sit through the meal, except on rare occasions, with an expression of utter boredom on his face, and he always took the earliest opportunity of retiring to his room overhead. Occasionally, however, Watts-Dunton would tactfully draw Swinburne out by appealing to him for his opinion on the matter under discussion, especially if it chanced to be one upon which the poet was a recognized authority. On these occasions Swinburne would delight in seizing upon some absurd aspect of the subject, and if the visitor took his sallies seriously, he would become more and more extravagant in his language.

Once at the luncheon-table, when one of the present writers[2] was present, Swinburne proved remarkably voluble. The guest had just returned to London after a two years' sojourn on the Normandy coast. He had spent most of these two years in walks or journeys by diligence between Fécamp and Étretat, with frequent halts for a week or so at a fascinating little fishing-place named Yport that nestled in the cliffs, a half-way village

[1] Mr. Coulson Kernahan, for whom Swinburne held a deep affection, has given a delightful account of the poet in his volume, *Good Company*.

[2] Thomas Hake.

between the two larger seaside resorts. It also chanced that he had recently undergone a somewhat similar swimming experience at Fécamp to Swinburne's famous one at Étretat.

Swinburne naturally seized upon the opportunity for repeating in graphic detail what he had told most of his friends many times before: the memorable incident at Étretat — the incident relating to that morning when he was borne seaward by the treacherous current, but miraculously rescued by smacksmen in the nick of time and safely landed at Yport. His description of the "drowning sensations" he experienced were never better related—how he realized that it would be futile to contend against the powerful current, and how, consequently, he threw himself upon his back and went floating away resignedly from the shore. He surpassed himself; not even in *Ex Voto* has he treated the incident with more poetic power than he did that afternoon at The Pines in bringing it vividly before his friend's mental vision. And then, changing his note, he presently went on, with many a touch of whimsical humour, to describe how, after having been hauled up in a semi-conscious state on board the fishing-smack that had hastened to his aid, on regaining complete consciousness, he found himself seated on deck, surrounded by the anxious-eyed smacksmen, who, after effectually restoring circulation by a process of rough-and-ready towelling, clothed him—for he had left his garments on the beach at Étretat—in an improvised suit, more spacious than picturesque. An overall in the shape of a sail that resembled a Roman toga more than any other article of dress

was wrapped about his shoulders, and he was furthermore furnished by his considerate friends, the trawlers, with a pair of roomy trousers made of coarse sacking, and fastened round the waist by means of a stout rope. These trousers were, in fact, so vast in circumference as to be more adapted to envelop the gigantic limbs of a Norse pirate than those of so slim and diminutive a person as the author of *Atalanta*. This strange suit he never parted with, but kept it during the later years of his life stowed away in an old box in the little lumber-room at The Pines known as "the tower"; and it was still there in that old box in that same little lumber-room at the time of his decease.

Swinburne was a keen student of prose fiction. That he clearly understood the novelist's art is shown in his brief introduction to his own story, *Love's Cross Currents*, in which he discussed Scott's adoption of the epistolary form in the discarded chapters of *The Fortunes of Nigel*.

But his knowledge of prose fiction was circumscribed. He had an inveterate dislike to works of fiction in translation, and the result was that he remained all his life unfamiliar with the great novelists of Russia, Scandinavia, and Germany. Every English novel worth reading, and, indeed, a great many that fastidious critics would account not worth reading, he read diligently.

His appreciation of Stevenson's novels was lessened by the author's self-conscious and too purely literary style. "In Stevenson's stories the style is always disturbing the illusion," he would say. "In a poem," he argued, "illusion is not, and should not be, the primary quest, though it should

undoubtedly always be the primary quest of the imaginative writer whose medium is prose." This, in some measure, may be said to have been Swinburne's attitude towards the novels of his "illustrious and much-admired friend," George Meredith. He thought highly of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* and *Evan Harrington;* but with the growing burden of years Swinburne became more self-indulgent in his reading of fiction, and Meredith's later novels seemed to him, to use his own phrase, "worrying in their style," and for that reason less palatable. When talking about these stories, he once said: "What he does is to 'mar a curious tale in telling it.'"[1] And yet Swinburne was quick enough to recognize the intellectual brilliance and fecundity of Meredith's work.

In French literature his acquaintance with Balzac, Victor Hugo, Dumas *père* and Dumas *fils*, Stendhal, Merimée, Flaubert, Gautier, and the rest was of the most exhaustive kind.

On the whole, however, his favourite novelists were English. Dickens, Walter Scott, and Jane Austen stood first in his estimation, and he had considerable admiration for Charles Reade and Wilkie Collins.

"An amazing book!" he said of *The Cloister and the Hearth.*

"Yes; but what a length!" said Watts-Dunton (apparently forgetting his own *Aylwin*).

"Not a *word* too many!" rejoined Swinburne sternly.

He had in his library at The Pines many an edition of his favourite authors, which he read to

[1] *King Lear*, I. iv.

himself and reread to others. It would be difficult to decide which of these writers lived most completely in that prodigious memory of his. Frequently he would quote pages from their novels, and with no more hesitation for a word than when one of the works rested upon the library table open before his eyes.[1]

Among more modern writers, there are few men for whom he had so warm an admiration as for Mr. Thomas Hardy. For many years past he had read aloud Mr. Hardy's novels to Mrs. Mason and others, and delighted especially in *Under the Greenwood Tree* and *Far from the Madding Crowd*, laughing uproariously over the rustic scenes, which he would read and reread. He was deeply impressed, moreover, by the powerful originality of *The Dynasts*. In the course of a letter to the author, dated January 23, 1904, he says:

"I have never read any dialogue of yours that gave me more delight than the fifth scene of the second act; nor any verse of yours that I more admired than the noble song which closes the fifth act. But if I may say it without offence, I trust you do not mean to give over your great work in creative romance even for the field of epic or historic drama."

Although Swinburne went rarely to the theatre in his later years, there are two occasions—both of them during the last few years of the nineteenth century—that are notable in their way. On the first occasion he went to see *The Merry Wives of*

[1] His sight was as strong at three score and ten as it was in his young days, and he could read anything without glasses.

Windsor when the late Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree (then Mr. Tree) first revived Shakespeare's comedy; and as the actors had special instructions, owing to his deafness, to "talk into his box," he heard a good deal of the performance. He seemed delighted with Tree's Falstaff, and during one of the intervals, being asked by Tree into one of his private rooms, he indulged in an eloquent pæan upon Falstaff. At this performance the lyric, *Love laid his sleepless head*, was introduced. Whether he approved of this complimentary innovation is not on record, but we do not imagine, knowing his views on such matters, that he would have been especially pleased. On the second occasion, during the last week of October, 1892, he went to a performance given at the Opera Comique, by the old Independent Theatre Society, of John Webster's fine but gruesome tragedy, *The Duchess of Malfi*. This is especially interesting in view of the fact that no modern writer has written more fervently about Webster's genius than Swinburne.

When not discussing the dramatists of the Elizabethan age, Swinburne and Watts-Dunton would talk over the poets and prosemen of their own age. The eighteenth century scarcely existed for either of them.

We recall a chat with Swinburne a year or so before his death about Wilkie Collins' works. The chat did not open propitiously, for a visitor had let fall some remark about Hazlitt's critical work, and Swinburne's face assumed an expression of frozen anger.

"We don't mention Hazlitt's name here," said Watts-Dunton in a hurried whisper, as if reference

had been made to an objectionable neighbour. "Neither I nor Swinburne care to talk about him on account of his abominable treatment of Coleridge."

Happily, the chance mention of Wilkie Collins' name saved the situation. The visitor, a great admirer of the Victorian novelist, had recently been rereading his books and Swinburne had been doing the same.

"What do you think of *The Moonstone?*" said Swinburne in a challenging voice.

"I think it's the cleverest thing Wilkie Collins ever wrote, but as a story I prefer *The Woman in White.*"

Swinburne's face lit up at once. "Ah! . . . yes . . . so do I. Watts-Dunton doesn't." He then started a rhapsody upon Fosco, and declared Marion Halcombe to be "a glorious woman."

Watts-Dunton spoke of the impressive opening of *The Moonstone*—one of the finest openings, he declared, of any novel of the "plot-ridden" genius.

"Yes, yes; it's a wonderful book," said Swinburne; and commented on the extraordinary skill with which the various narratives are taken up by the different persons. He went on to talk about the "rose-loving Inspector Cuff" as if he had been a personal friend, comparing him with another favourite character of his — Inspector Bucket. "Each," he said, "was excellent in his way, and yet Collins' character owed nothing at all to Dickens' vivid creation."

Perhaps, on the whole, Swinburne was more drawn towards Dickens than he was towards Scott,

notwithstanding the fact that Scott is a poet as well as a great novelist. But when one reminded him of the fact that Dickens on one or two occasions "dropped into poetry," he would look sad and instantly change the subject. Swinburne was wont to say that the only heaven into which he hoped to enter when he died was a heaven not holding an assembly of "angels fingering harps," but "angels with the genius of Dickens, Victor Hugo, and Jane Austen."

The greater part of his poetry was composed in the open air, for, although he would sit of an evening, pen in hand, with his three tall wax candles at the back of him so that the light fell on the page before him, the poems he then recorded had been conceived and mentally achieved during walks across the heath. He had an extraordinary memory,[1] and nearly every line he composed out of doors became fixed in his brain ready for transmission to paper. Many a time was he heard chanting some such verse as the following, as he came in at the front door of The Pines, and mounted the staircase to his library on a spring day:

> "Far and near
> All the world is heaven: and man and flower and bird
> Here are one at heart with all things seen and heard."

The story which Mr. Gosse quotes about the chance meeting of Swinburne and the late Miss Edith Sichel is an illustration of the persistence with which the tradition of the flame-haired Swinburne persisted even during the Putney period.

Miss Sichel relates an experience of hers in 1890. "One evening at dusk, walking along

[1] It was not wholly reliable as to personal experiences.

the edge of Wimbledon Common in a thick white mist, suddenly Swinburne," she suggests, "stumbled over her," and she refers to the "blaze of red hair which seemed to part the mist like a flame."

The "nocturne," as Mr. Gosse happily terms it, is told in spirited fashion, and is quite an amusing tale. Unhappily, as an encounter with the poet it has two defects. In the first place, Swinburne never went for a walk in the evening. His friends at The Pines are absolutely certain on that point. He was a creature of custom in his daily ritual, and never went out of doors after his midday walk. If deprived of his midday walk, he waited till the next day. A second defect of the story lies in the picturesque touch of the "blaze of red hair." When he came to The Pines in the late seventies the hair, then very scanty, was reddish-grey at the sides, while he was quite bald at the top. And in 1890 even the reddish tinge had merged into grey, and it was scantier still. "A blaze of red hair" certainly there could not have been.

During the last few years of his life he was rarely away from The Pines, so there are few letters in this period. And among these one only addressed to his friend is concerned with books. But the following, though written at a time when he was far from well, shows much of his old vivacity:

"*September* 7, 1896.

"MY DEAR WALTER,

"I purpose to finish my introductory essay before turning my attention to anything else. I do not in the least care when the collected edition is

to appear—though I should have thought it was for us to determine the date of its appearance—but I must get the business off my hands once for all as soon as may be. I could not think of having to take up the task again. As for verse, before I can turn to that again I must be quit of the accursed twins, sleeplessness and sleepiness, and get to the seaside to renew myself. I never wanted my natural element more. You too, if overworked, must want the same change, and betimes.

"Did you ever see '*The Plain Dealer* (not Wycherley's): being Select Essays on several Curious Subjects relating to Friendship, Love and Gallantry, Marriage, Morality, Mercantile Affairs, Painting, History, Poetry, and other *Branches* of *Polite Literature*, 1724'? Occasional edification is to be derived from its pages. The writer of the opening sentence of No. 88 is surely a rival and counterpart in prose to myself in poetry.

"'The *Sea* is the most *Vast* of all the visible Objects of Nature: And, when the Wind adds *Disturbance* and *Motion* to its Immensity, There is nothing that seems so *Dreadfully* proportion'd to the Greatness of its Almighty Creator!' (Friday, January 22, 1725).

"Addisonian chastity is not, as you would expect, the invariable characteristic of this devout paper. No. 93, on country superstitions, is curious and amusing. No. 116 is a 'Letter in Commendation of Shakespeare's Poems, which are not commonly sold with his Dramatick Performances.' But the Publick, Apparently, drew the Line at such a Topick as this: for the Next was the Last Number of this Meritorious Periodical.

"Did I send you (from the *British Critic*) this couplet on the accidental death of a volunteer?

"'He fell: Fame sounded, Simpson is no more:
And grateful Maidstone bled at every pore.'

I am not sure that the name was so aristocratic or sonorous as Simpson; it was certainly not more so.

"I wish you could send me better accounts of Morris. Have you told him how I have enjoyed the *Well at the World's End*, and in what a fit place for reading it?

"With all good remembrances from all,

"Ever affectionately yours,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

Increasingly in his letters from the time of his coming to live with Watts-Dunton does Nature play a part in his imaginative life. The earlier correspondence is richer in purely literary allusions and literary likings; but during his later years the continuous influence of his friend's passion for the earth is reflected in his own inner life.

The following letters written at different times when away from The Pines, at Holmwood, or at Bradford-on-Avon, illustrate this characteristic:

"LEIGH HOUSE,
"BRADFORD-ON-AVON, WILTS,
"*October* 6, 1887.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"Alice and I had a delightful walk yesterday up through the hanging woods by the right-hand track (which we took, if I remember) and over the downs to the farthest and narrowest edge of all, commanding a triune view (at each and on either hand) of the country far below, and back through

the upper copse and down the other track which you have yet to see. She was not a bit overtired, and is none the worse, but (I hope) all the better. The day before your minor[1] had (he must confess) broken bounds and played truant in a very Etonian fashion, and came home so torn with brambles and stung with nettles that he felt rather as if he were returning from a subsequent and consequent interview with the Head Master (the birch itself could hardly have stung more or lacerated the flesh quite so severely; I can feel, while I write, one long jagged cut or scratch on the fleshy hinder-part of my right thigh—quite appropriate as the truant's doom, and vividly suggestive of vivid reminiscences). I must take you down a steep, grassy dell into a most lovely bit of woodland glen which I then discovered, and on along a very high and very steep bank clothed with beeches (no birches to make a fellow feel uncomfortable out of bounds) where the shadow and sunlight on the ruddy broken slopes and intricate winding tracks are hardly to be rendered even by a Shakespeare or a Turner, a Coleridge or a Keats.

"Another day I saw from the highest part of the downs (otherwise Hinchcombe Hill) a very strange and grand sight. Looking across the valley of the Severn to the other and immediately opposite height far beyond the estuary, I was bewildered by the apparition of a huge and magnificent castle, perfect at all points (Victor Hugo could and would have given you every detail of its architecture), and built apparently of some most

[1] Swinburne used to refer chaffingly to himself in speaking to his friend as "your minor," with reference to their comparative ages.

beautiful deep (rather than dark) grey stone. I could not believe my eyes, or understand how they could have missed it on previous days (though, as I bethought me, one does sometimes overlook the most obvious objects, in the most incredible or impossible way, at a first or second glance over a wide landscape), nor how the hugest building of human hands could seem so huge at such a distance, while towns and woods and villages between and beneath were of next to no dimension at all. I half thought it must or might be cloud, though I never saw cloud so exact as well as solid in masonry or shape; but after a good stretch of walk (for upwards of half an hour—at least, I think) I came back, and there it stood exactly as before—the same, apparently, to a hair's breadth. After I had taken another good spell of walking and returned it was gone. I need not tell you whether or not I came home with the immortal and transcendent dialogue of Antony with Eros on clouds and man humming (so to speak) in my head."

"LEIGH HOUSE,
"BRADFORD-ON-AVON, WILTS,
"*October* 16, 1887.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"Expect me (D., need I say? V.) on Tuesday next, all ready to proceed seaward on Wednesday. My cold is daily and steadily improving, in consequence of my defying advice and taking a good long tramp daily. I wish you had been with me an hour ago when I was tramping down a steep, wide lane enclosed on either side with gorgeous autumnal trees, the broad water of the Avon gleaming through them here and there—far below

—to the right. This strip of road, descending from a beautiful and quaint village bearing the pugilistically suggestive name of Conkwell towards the hideous and deformed upper part of Bradford, is one of the most curious bits of scenery I know to the Christian thinker, a realized allegory. For, according to the route you take, in going or in returning, you pass from foul ugliness and worldly grime to divine glory of woodland and heavenly expanse of hillside open to the influences of heaven, or—alas! alas!—*vice versa*. Let us pray, my friend, that *our* pilgrimage in this valley of trial may, etc., etc.

"Ever yours,

"A. C. SWINBURNE."

Sunday was the one prosaic time in Swinburne's life at The Pines. Ennui was the prevailing note of the day, for then he never took his accustomed walk across Wimbledon Common; however bright and enticing the weather might appear from the open library window, however black the sky with threats of a thunderstorm — which would have tempted him still more to go forth—he remained resolutely indoors. And so throughout the day he sat surrounded by his Elizabethan dramatists, but without a smile upon his usually animated face. His reason for imposing this forced imprisonment was a simple one, characteristic of the man.

When first taking up his residence on Putney Hill, he had strolled out on a Sunday scarcely mindful what day of the week it might be, and had been rudely interrupted by a boisterous holiday crowd in the midst of a poetic meditation in the

neighbourhood of one of those quiet spots—on weekdays—near the Windmill, where he seldom encountered a living soul. The same experience befell him on the following Sunday. This decided him, and he never ventured abroad on Sundays again. Schiller had a similar experience. So Swinburne did his best to kill time by extending his hours of sleep.

All through life Swinburne was as ardent a walker and swimmer as George Borrow. During the last few years of his life he had few opportunities of indulging in his love for swimming, but he was an excellent walker up to the very end.

In a letter written to Watts-Dunton he says:

"LEIGH HOUSE,
"BRADFORD-ON-AVON,
"*July* 15, 1885.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"I took a walk of more than twelve—perhaps fifteen or sixteen—miles yesterday afternoon and evening through some of the most beautiful woodlands, by some of the most bewildering roads. I even saw and found myself, after some hours, bearing right upon Bath instead of returning hither. . . . You must come and see the view now that I do know the way."

And in another letter, while staying with Lady Jane Swinburne, he writes:

"BROCKHAMPTON PARK,
"ANDOVERSFORD,
"*July* 29, 1891.

"MY DEAR WALTER,

"I have found an odd relief in working at my essay on social verse during this anxious time,

and to-day in walking for hours on end at full speed through heavy rain for much of the way—upwards of twenty miles."

As it was then, so it was year after year, when going, as usual, "at full speed through heavy rain."

Coming in at The Pines one day from his wonted walk across Wimbledon Common, out of one of these downpours, with the rain dripping from his sombrero over his back and shoulders (for he never wore an overcoat), Swinburne encountered Watts-Dunton in the entrance hall. His sedate friend glanced at him from head to foot, concerned at his saturated condition.

"You're wet through, I'm afraid," said he.

"By Jove, rather! Your minor is drenched to the skin," was Swinburne's response, an expression of exhilaration and triumph spreading over his face. It was the look, the whole manner of the Eton boy in Swinburne reproduced to the life. And he repeated his words, "drenched to the skin," in that self-communing tone so common with him as he tramped upstairs with that heavy, weary tread which, when he returned from a prolonged ramble, had grown heavier and more weary as the years went by. That tread upon the stairs always reminded one of a tired, portly giant rather than of a slim, little man measuring barely five feet five inches in height.

To these thoughtless, boyish escapades must be attributed the direct cause of Swinburne's decease. It was through exposing himself to a chilly wind and heavy rain during one of these walks in March,

1909, that he caught the severe chill which brought about the end.

His remarkable constitution had been somewhat undermined six years earlier by an attack of pneumonia; and it now became frequently noticeable, when entering the dining-room from his walk, that he would sink down in his accustomed place at the luncheon-table so obviously exhausted on most occasions that, although he made a brave attempt at joining in the midday meal, the lack of appetite could not be disguised. This alone was enough to cause his friends anxiety. But besides this failing of appetite, other and more serious signs of fatigue were to be seen in his worn look, and occasionally a slight limp in his gait, and still more in a disfiguring slope of his right shoulder so distressing as to suggest incipient paralysis. Not that Swinburne's mental condition was impaired by this excessive bodily exertion, nor were his animal spirits in any way diminished. And when his accustomed afternoon siesta had taken place, every token of physical distress would seem to disappear. Still, with all his manifest power of rapid recuperation, it was perfectly obvious to those who saw him at The Pines with these visible signs of increasing physical debility, that the "arm-chair days" were approaching. But those dreaded "arm-chair days" never came. Before the period of decrepitude overtook him, Swinburne died.

It was on the day after the drenching just referred to that a distressful cold showed itself; symptoms of an incipient attack of influenza rapidly followed, and yet he continued his walks across Wimbledon Common, and always at the rate

of four miles an hour; nothing would persuade him to return to bed, when, on coming downstairs to breakfast, serious signs of the illness to which he rapidly succumbed were only too apparent. He even expressed some intention of starting for his accustomed walk, and it was only when a peremptory message came from Watts-Dunton (then confined to his bed with bronchitis), impressing upon him the folly of venturing out in the face of an east wind, that he was induced to abandon the project. He had taken his last walk.

He seemed scarcely to realize, when he went to his bedroom and took to his bed with the greatest reluctance, how exceedingly ill he was.

One of the members of the household, entering his bedroom on the first day of that fatal illness, found him propped up among pillows laughing heartily over a sensational story. On the following day, when rising to cross his bedroom towards his bookcase to take down some other "thriller," he was heard to fall upon the floor. He was found lying there in a half-fainting condition, and had to be lifted back into bed. That afternoon he was carried downstairs into his library, where a bed had been put up, and before the evening his medical man, Mr. Edwin White, had called in Sir Douglas Powell. Two hospital nurses were already in attendance. Pneumonia, which rapidly developed into double pneumonia, had set in, an illness that led to his death in a few days.

APPENDIX A

Letters (Translated) from Victor Hugo to Swinburne (1867-1874).

"Mandeville House,
"*July* 1, 1867.

"My honourable and dear *Confrère*,

"Before your beautiful book I am Tantalus. Just imagine my tortures! I do not know English. A gracious friend has translated for me the noble and magnificent strophies which you address to me. You are, by virtue of your inspiration and elevated thought, in the first rank of English poets. No one surpasses you. I am proud of your touching sympathy, and I send you my most cordial *shake-hand.*

"Victor Hugo."

"Mandeville House,
"*July* 14 (the great date), 1869.

"Dear and cordial Poet,

"I have been profoundly moved by your letter and by your article. You speak admirably about *L'homme qui rit.* You are right—you, Byron, Shelley, three Republicans, three aristocrats; and as for me—it is from aristocracy that I have risen to democracy. Thank you, *Eximo corde*, for your magnificent work about my book. What

high philosophy and what a profound intuition you possess! In the great critic one feels the great poet.

"Cordial *shake-hand*,

"VICTOR HUGO.

"Thanks for the precious portrait. When shall I have the good fortune to see you?"

"MANDEVILLE HOUSE,
"*November* 24, 1869.

"MY DEAR AND CORDIAL *CONFRÈRE*,

"An admirable article on *L'homme qui rit*, translated by 'Le Courier de l'Europe,' has been reproduced in France and in Belgium, and has made a great sensation. How can I thank you for that other excellent piece of work which answers the puerile and ignorant criticism of *The Times*, and which the *Daily Telegraph* has published? At this very moment your magnificent strophies are being translated to me, and I cannot deny myself the happiness of applauding you.

"Your friend,

"VICTOR HUGO."

"MANDEVILLE HOUSE,
"*May* 11, 1870.

"MY YOUNG AND NOBLE *CONFRÈRE*,

"At this moment they are in the act of trying me in Paris—that is to say, of condemning me. Bonaparte is giving himself this joy, and I, on my side, I am giving myself one, for I am writing to you. I await with impatience your new work. Although my son is no longer near me, I will find means of having your work translated. I have a charming neighbour who admires you. She will be

a means of uniting my spirit and yours. From time to time she reads me a page out of the beautiful book which you dedicated to me in such noble terms, and I applaud, touched and moved.

"I am yours,

"VICTOR HUGO."

"MANDEVILLE HOUSE,
"*April* 24, 1870.

"MY NOBLE AND DEAR *CONFRÈRE*,

"You have honoured a few of my verses by translating them. I am in the humiliating condition of knowing no English, and I have had your translation read by a charming English woman, my neighbour.

"She is lost in admiration of you, dear poet, and of your works. She tells me, and I know it, that you are the first actual poet of England. I wrote to you on the occasion of your magnificent article on *L'homme qui rit*, repeated, as you no doubt know, by several newspapers in France and in Belgium (notably in *Le Rappel*). I think you must have received my letters. I am happy at the same time that I have the occasion of sending you a hand-shake.

"VICTOR HUGO."

"MANDEVILLE HOUSE,
"*September* 22, 1872.

"Oh! my poet, I wished to write to you today, great anniversary of the Republic. It is on September 22 that I reply to your superb ode of September 4. My son is close beside me: we read you together; he translates Swinburne as he

translates Shakespeare. How splendid your *Songs before Sunrise* are! Your article on *L'année Terrible* has riveted the attention of Paris. You have no doubt read on that subject *Le Rappel* and *Le République*. You have an admirable genius and a large heart. I have your portrait; here is mine.

"Dear and noble poet, I wring both your hands.

"VICTOR HUGO."

"PARIS,
"*May* 18, 1874.

"MY HONOURABLE AND EMINENT *CONFRÈRE*,

"I seize this opportunity to send you, you the poet of England, the cordial hand-shake from the poets of France. You know how much I love you. You addressed to me on the occasion of the death of my beloved son a sonnet, so elegant and pathetic. I did not write to you then. I had not the strength to do so. To-day I have regained something of my ancient vitality, and I wish you to know, dear poet, that my old heart is yours.

"VICTOR HUGO."

APPENDIX B

While this book was passing through the press, Mr. Clement Shorter made some remarks upon Swinburne in the *Sphere* which justly aroused the resentment and anger of the poet's friends.

Readers of this volume may judge from the poet's correspondence to his friends after 1879 (when he went to The Pines), as well as from his literary and other activities, how grotesque is the taunt now gratuitously flung at Swinburne's memory. We

reproduce here Mr. Coulson Kernahan's letter on the subject. Few men living are better qualified to speak on the subject than he, for he was an intimate friend both of Swinburne and Watts-Dunton.

THE ATTACK ON SWINBURNE.

A Protest.

To the Editor of the "Daily Chronicle."

"Sir,

"In a recent issue of the *Sphere*, Mr. Clement Shorter asserts that 'Swinburne's drunken habits were followed by premature senility in that terrible *ménage* at The Pines.' Whether Swinburne was or was not 'prematurely senile' is, of course, a matter of opinion, and Mr. Shorter is free to have his, and if he so choose, to express it. His views on this and other matters are not my views, but that does not concern me. What does concern me, as a friend of Watts-Dunton and Swinburne (and I write by the wish and with the concurrence of other old friends of both), is that such statements as Mr. Shorter's should not go unchallenged.

"I question whether anyone (unless bent for personal reasons on belittling Swinburne) who knew the poet in later life would not deride as preposterous, and denounce as false, this allegation of 'premature senility.' Would Mr. Shorter have written of Swinburne, as he now does, while the poet was alive, and (this alleged senility, notwithstanding) more than able, effectually, to answer Mr. Shorter, and to defend himself?

"I protest, sir, against Mr. Shorter's wording in the phrase 'Swinburne's drunken habits.' If it were necessary—and I ask why it should be?—to refer at all to the painful fact that Swinburne was, very many years ago, a dipsomaniac, why not have spoken of the poet's 'former habits'? Mr. Shorter's 'Literary Letter' is read by many unacquainted with the facts, and his wording may give rise to a deplorable and even

slanderous impression; for Mr. Shorter knows that for the last thirty years the poet's life was as wisely ordered and as temperate as Mr. Shorter's own. It was not thus that Mr. Gosse wrote of Swinburne in his brilliant 'Life.' That a man of supreme genius, as Swinburne was, should have a constitutional weakness, or tendency, towards alcohol calls, surely, for our pity and sorrow. The fact that, in Swinburne's case, the weakness was nobly combated and entirely overcome, calls for our honour and respect, and for our gratitude to the chivalrous friend who assisted so much towards victory.

"Mr. Shorter's repeated disparagements of Watts-Dunton —that 'hero of friendship,' as Mr. W. M. Rossetti calls him — whose self-sacrificing devotion, not only to Swinburne, but also to D. G. Rossetti, constitutes one of the most memorable chapters in the history of literary friendships, I will not discuss, except to say that I am not the only old friend of Watts-Dunton who reads the disparagements with wonder and pain. What Mr. Shorter means by 'the terrible *ménage* at The Pines' I am absolutely at a loss to understand. As in the case of the allusion to Swinburne's long-past habits, his words are open to grave misunderstanding, for which there is not one shadow of reason. The life together of the three friends was of the happiest, Watts-Dunton and his wife being devoted to each other, and Swinburne's attitude to both being that of an affectionate brother.

"The pain with which one reads Mr. Shorter's allusions is the greater for the fact that, while Swinburne and Watts-Dunton were alive, Mr. Shorter was welcomed to their home, was believed by both to be their friend, and shared their salt.

"I pen this protest while Mr. Shorter and I are both alive, and he, at least, is more than competent to take care of himself. It is with no personal animus against him—an old and good friend of mine—that I do so, but because the men of whom he speaks have passed into the Great Silence and can utter no word in their own defence.

"COULSON KERNAHAN.

"FROGNAL,
"FAIRLIGHT, NEAR HASTINGS."

APPENDIX C

The following letters (discovered too late for inclusion in the body of this book) illustrate Swinburne's interest in the younger generation of novelists. He was always a great reader of fiction, and no one was more generous in praise than he, when attracted to a writer. On the other hand, he never indulged in perfunctory laudation, and when uninterested, as was often the case in the many books brought before his notice, he threw the work aside and offered no crumb of comfort even in the shape of a formal acknowledgment. These letters are therefore a genuine expression of interest and admiration. Mrs. Coulson Kernahan and Mr. John Laurence Lambe may well prize them.

Letter from Mr. Swinburne to Mrs. Coulson Kernahan (then Mrs. Bettany).

"The Pines,
"Putney Hill, S.W.,
"*April* 8, 1885.

"Dear Madam,

"Your letter has but this instant reached me—two days later than your book, which I have been reading with sincere interest. It seems to me very powerful and original, and I am much obliged to you for the gift of a copy.

"Yours very sincerely,
"A. C. Swinburne."

LETTER FROM MR. SWINBURNE TO MR. JOHN LAURENCE LAMBE.

"2, THE PINES,
"PUTNEY HILL, S.W.
"*June*, 9, 1901.

"DEAR SIR,

"I must apologize for some delay in acknowledging, with many thanks, the gift of your 'true romance.' The interest is as enthralling as it is terrible.

"Yours sincerely,
"A. C. SWINBURNE.

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